

955
E448
a

v.1

306

ANTHONY FAIRFAX.

(Elliott, E

A Nobel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

UNION OF
CALIFORNIA



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1885.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

TO THE
LIBRARY OF THE
CONGRESS

15.12.1885

PZ
3
A632
1885
v.1
MAIN

ANTHONY FAIRFAX.



PART I.





ANTHONY FAIRFAX.

CHAPTER 1.

‘A prison-grate,
Which slurs the sunshine half a mile.’

JUST outside the town of Middleton stands the County Gaol, a large building, or rather set of buildings, surrounded by a high massive wall of red brick. Children going on their walks pass the prison slowly, staring at the frowning wall, and wondering how the prisoners on the other side feel. When

M37491

they come to the doorway, they shrink a little and grasp their nurse's hand tightly; but they cannot turn away their gaze from a little, narrow door, high up in the wall, which they have been told was used formerly to let out condemned men when they came to suffer death. The children are fascinated by the horrible association, and they must stare, though they are glad when they have left the big prison behind.

It is a gloomy place at whatever time of year you see it; and on a certain day in June it looked dreary and cheerless, although strong sunlight fell on the bricks and brought out warm touches of red. The shadows of the frowning walls did their best to obscure the sunshine and chill the heat, and the very sky over the building did not look bright.

The door swung slowly open, and two men came out. One hurried over the threshold, and made a few quick steps away; the other came slowly, with a dragging, reluctant step—neither turned back to give a last look at the place they were leaving. The first—a big, rough-looking young man in workman's clothes—paused, and waited for the other to come up to him, and they walked on side by side.

The entrance of the prison stands back from the road. As they reached the path, a young lady passed, holding a large bunch of red roses. The workman's eye fell upon them, and he exclaimed involuntarily :

‘ Eh, what bonny flowers !’

The girl heard him and looked at him, smiling. She stopped and offered him some of her roses.

‘Would you like them?’ she said, in a sweet, clear voice.

The man looked embarrassed, turned a little red, and accepted the gift.

‘Thank you, miss,’ he said, touching his cap awkwardly.

The girl turned to his companion to bestow some flowers upon him, and was stretching out her hand, but she drew it back with an expression of perplexity and embarrassment. He did not belong to the class who would beg for the gift of a flower as she walked through the poor quarters of the town. She blushed in her annoyance as she saw that she was accosting a man who looked like a gentleman, though he was walking abreast of this common workman.

The young man lifted his eyes for the first time since he had put his foot over the

threshold of the prison-door, and looked at her with an absent gaze, almost as if he did not see her. She turned her eyes away, and saw the door which was just shutting, started, and looked back again with an expression of bewildered, incredulous suspicion. An answering flash of defiance came into the dull eyes, which still regarded her mechanically. He threw back his head, drew himself up, and walked straight on with a firm step.

The workman hastily followed, and for a short way they walked at a quick pace. Then the other's spurt of energy seemed exhausted, and he paused at a crossing.

'I suppose, Mr. Lingen, I'd better say good-day here?' said Bob Dixon. 'It'll do you no good to be seen with me, and of course a gentleman like you is above my

company. I thought I'd just like to say good-bye.'

'Which of us, do you think, looks most disreputable?' asked the other.

'Why, sir, for the matter of that, I don't see that either of us need be disreputable. You've done nothing at all——'

'That's your opinion.'

'Yes, sir, it is my opinion, and I'll stick to it. I'm not fool enough to believe that you could do a shabby trick. And as for me, bless you, there's nothing disreputable in killing a hare or two. But that's neither here nor there. Good-bye, sir. Don't get down-hearted.'

'Good-bye. You're a good fellow, Dixon.'

'If I might make so bold, sir, might I ask where you're going?'

'To the devil.'

‘But which road, sir? That’s not much of a direction.’

Anthony Lingen laughed—a very mirthless laugh.

‘I don’t know where I am going. I’ve got nowhere to go to.’

‘Your friends, sir?’

‘My good fellow, I haven’t a friend in the world. There is not a soul whom I ever knew who would speak to me now. And—I didn’t think of it till this moment—I have no money either.’

‘O Lord!’ said Dixon, in a tone of consternation. He appeared far more disturbed than Anthony himself.

‘What *will* you do?’

‘God knows,’ in a hopeless, indifferent tone, which made the words sound almost blasphemous.

Dixon kicked a stone into the road,

and devoted some persons unspecified to perdition; then he took off his cap and wiped his forehead, looking pityingly at Mr. Lingen.

‘Hold on, sir!’ he exclaimed, catching the other’s arm as he suddenly turned deadly white. ‘Aren’t you well?’

He was drawing him towards the nearest shop, but Lingen resisted, and shook his head.

‘It’s nothing,’ he said faintly, when he could speak. ‘I felt giddy.’

‘I say, look here!’ said Bob. ‘Come along with me now. I’m going to my brother who lives in the town. He’s a kind sort of chap, and we’ll get something to eat, and you can sit down and rest a bit—you look quite shaky—and make up your mind what you’ll do next.’

He made the proposal half-eagerly, half-

shyly. It seemed too great a freedom to take, and he was surprised when Mr. Lingen said:

‘Thanks, Dixon; I’ll walk that way with you at all events.’

‘Haven’t you thought at all of what you’d do when you were out?’ said Bob, as they walked onward.

‘Oh yes, I’ve thought of it,’ rejoined Anthony, with a touch of irritability which made his tone sharp.

Thought of it! He had thought of little else lately. Since he had realized that his dreary days of punishment, long as they seemed, would come to an end, his mind had dwelt on that end persistently. But it was not with the feelings that the prospect of freedom might have been expected to rouse that he looked forward—not with impatient expectation and hope, but with

pain and shrinking. His imagination was too benumbed and stupefied by the routine of prison-life to be capable of forming pleasant images. He could not anticipate anything good.

He would be no better off out of prison than in it—indeed, as the day of his departure drew near, he became aware of a morbid reluctance to leave the gaol. He could not bear to think of stepping out into the free, outer world. He had lost his place there. Rather than face the life of degradation he was condemned to, he would hide himself for ever.

He had lain awake night after night, every mental nerve racked as he thought of the shipwreck which had befallen him, thinking with horror of his approaching release, ready to wish that he could die before the day. It stood up like a blank

wall before him; he could never go beyond it with thoughts or wishes. On the other side of it there was nothing but a horror of darkness, a life which was unbearable, a miserable confusion.

Now that the day had come, and he was no longer shut in by friendly prison walls, his chief desire was to escape from the open street and to find some shelter where he could be protected from human eyes. He shrank from the glaring light, and dared not look at the passers-by, for it was possible that among them there might be one who had seen him in the dock a year ago. He felt as if the prison stamp was indelibly marked upon him. Even that girl had seen that he was fresh from a cell.

He went with his rough companion because he clung to the only human being who had a kind word or thought for him.

Only a little while ago, he would have scoffed, like Hazael, if he had been told that he would one day feel a thrill of gratitude for the kindness of a convicted poacher.

Bob Dixon led him in silence, not knowing what to say, and a little awed by his look of blank despair. He did not understand it; and no description could have made him enter into the misery which possessed the other. It was an awful pity that Mr. Lingen had fallen into 'trouble;' but he would get over it in time. There was a blunder somewhere, Dixon was firmly convinced, and that blunder must be rectified sooner or later. There was no need for Mr. Lingen to make himself miserable about it now. His prison-time was over, and he ought to be glad of that.

That Mr. Lingen was very much worse

off than himself in pocket and character, Bob could not see. He could not associate destitution with him. Something must turn up, he felt assured—a gentleman like Mr. Lingen couldn't stay down in the world.

Bob had conceived an enthusiastic attachment for his prison acquaintance, and he had an ardent belief in him. He had noticed him first in the gaol-chapel. Looking idly round one morning, when he felt severely bored by the prayers—they were meaningless to him, and it was a point of honour with him to pay no attention to them, for he had been brought up in one of the straitest sects of Dissenters—he had been struck by Anthony's face.

Among the other faces—some hardened by want, some brutalized by crime, some dull with ignorance, some haggard with

hard drinking—the young, refined features were peculiarly noticeable. ‘How in all the world did he get there?’ thought Bob to himself. ‘He can’t have been stealing, or drinking, or poaching.’

Bob watched him with such close interest that he forgot to fidget, and stood perfectly quiet; and still as he gazed his wonder to see a gentleman there increased, and a deep commiseration took possession of him. For it was clear, even to Bob’s somewhat dull brain, that the stranger was suffering keenly. He looked crushed and hopeless, and he never raised his head, or looked up from the page which he was not reading.

After that day Bob watched him whenever he could, and at last they became acquainted. Bob’s interest in his fellow-prisoner only grew and deepened, and it was an appreciable addition to his joy at

his release that it took place on the same day as Mr. Lingen's.

He wished that Mr. Lingen would show some natural satisfaction at regaining freedom; it made him uncomfortable to see him appear so wretched—rather so stupefied; and he would have liked to indulge in conversation now that there was no check upon his tongue. But Mr. Lingen remained silent almost the whole way. He opened his lips once to finish his answer to Bob's question.

'Of course, the first thing I intend to do is to get away from this place. I must sell my watch and chain—that will surely give me money enough to buy a railway ticket.'

'You ought to get a good price for them if the watch is as good as the chain, sir,' said Bob.

They made their way through several streets inhabited by the poorer class; across a bridge, and down a road which a king took on his way to battle and death four hundred years ago. They had left the noise of the town behind them when they came to a row of small houses. Bob opened the door of one, and led the way into a little parlour, furnished in the usual style of such rooms. The carpet was too bright in colour and too crude in design, the paper was too like the carpet in these respects; there was the inevitable group of wax flowers under a shade; but everything was so clean and neat that the room looked attractive. Some plants in the window and some books on a set of shelves at one side of the fireplace softened down the effect of the furniture.

‘Sit down here, sir,’ said Bob gently.

‘Is there anything I can get for you?’ he added, as the other sat down without speaking or giving a glance at the room he was in.

‘No, thank you; I only want to rest a few minutes till this giddiness has quite gone. Go and speak to your people, Dixon.’

‘And do you know, Cousin Margaret,’ the heroine of the roses was saying about this time, ‘I wondered for a moment whether he had been staying in the prison, and I felt quite shocked.’

‘What was he like?’

‘He was tall and very slight, with dark hair and a pale face, and dark eyes with such a miserable expression in them when he looked at me first; and then when he saw I was treating him like the poor man

and offering him flowers, he looked offended. It was very stupid of me not to notice at once that he was a gentleman. He must have thought me a very strange-mannered person.'

'Just coming out of the prison, you say?'

'No, I don't know that he was. I fancied that he might be, as the door was just closing; but that was nothing, of course. Somebody might have been going in.'

'Your description fits poor young Lingen. Perhaps it was he whom you saw, Bee. It is about the time when he would be coming out, isn't it, Charles?'

'No, I don't think so. He would be out before this, certainly. Don't you remember, my dear?' And there was a somewhat long statement of the calcula-

tions by which he settled the date of young Lingen's release.

'Who was young Lingen, and what did he do, Cousin Charles?' asked Bee.

'He was tried for robbing his employer—a relation of his,' said Cousin Charles—'and he was sentenced to a year's imprisonment.'

'It was a sad thing,' said Cousin Margaret. 'He was very young—a mere lad, and he belonged to a very respectable family in the town. It made a great deal of talk. One couldn't help being sorry for him, and some people wouldn't believe he was guilty.'

'I always thought he was a mere tool in bad hands,' said Cousin Charles, 'and' (changing his metaphor) 'he was used as a scapegoat when it became convenient.'

Beatrice listened, with a pensive look coming over her face.

‘What a miserable story!’ she said. ‘The young man I saw looked unhappy enough for that Mr. Lingen. He made me feel quite ashamed—as if I had no right to be happy when other people were so gloomy. I was enjoying the beautiful morning and my roses so much, and it was so strange to see that wretched face in the sunshine.’

‘Most likely you imagined the wretchedness, Bee.’

‘Perhaps. I hope I did. It isn’t comfortable to think of people being so wretched in reality.’



CHAPTER II.

‘Sick in the world’s regard, wretched and low.’

SHAKESPEARE.

BOB went into the kitchen behind the parlour, and there found his sister-in-law, a young woman about twenty-five, strong-looking, and red-cheeked as only one brought up in the country can be. She looked up from the ironing-board, and exclaimed:

‘Bob, is it you?’

‘Ay, it’s me.’

‘I’m glad to see you,’ she said, heartily shaking hands. ‘I was expecting you. I told Joe you’d come here first of all. Sit

down, and I'll get you something to eat in the twinkling of a bedpost. Poor lad! you'll be fairly starved. Joe will be glad to see you. Sit down.'

'Wait a minute, Lizzie. I've brought some one with me.'

Lizzie stopped in an energetic dash across the room, and fixed her eyes steadily on her brother-in-law.

'If it's anybody respectable, Bob——' she said meaningly.

'Whisht, woman! he'll hear you. Of course he's respectable; would I bring him to *your* house if he wasn't? - It's just a gentleman that's been'—Bob paused for a euphemism—'in trouble. It wasn't his fault, I'll go bail; and now he's come out, and he says he hasn't a friend in the world. I felt fairly sorry for him, so I brought him here to rest a while. He looks awfully ill—poor chap!'

‘Well, Bob,’ said Mrs. Dixon, ‘if he is not well, of course he’s welcome to stop here a bit. But it’s a queer thing that he has no friends.’

‘Some folks always turn on a man when he’s down in the world. It isn’t everybody that’s got such good friends as I have,’ said Bob.

‘It would be a poor tale if we turned against you because you’d got into a scrape. Not but what I think you were to blame, Bob, and I’ve always said so, and told Joe so, over and over again, when he’s been talking of you and called you all sorts of things.’

‘Called me!’ said Bob, in a tone of surprise.

‘Oh, he hasn’t called you anything bad ; he took your part from the first. He says you’re the “victim of an unjust law,” and a lot more like that. You know his way.

But I said: "Joe," says I, "whether the law's just or not, I can't say; but as it is the law, Bob was a fool to go and break it."'

'Ay, ay; you're right, Lizzie. I shan't go poaching any more. It don't pay, and that's a fact. But just give me some water for Mr. Lingen. He had a faint turn as we came along.'

He went with the water into the other room. Next moment a frightened call of 'Lizzie!' was heard; and Mrs. Dixon hurried after him, and found him bending over a man who was lying back on the little couch.

'He was lying like this when I came in,' said Bob.

'He's fainted,' said Lizzie, taking the water from him and dashing some in the stranger's face. 'He'll be round directly.'

She looked in great amazement at her uninvited guest. The unconscious face was very young and handsome, with well-cut features, and an air of delicacy and refinement. Bob had called him a gentleman, but Lizzie had expected to see a much coarser specimen of humanity.

‘Poor lad! he’s very good-looking,’ she exclaimed, as she pushed back a lock of soft, dark brown hair.

It was some time before he gave any sign of consciousness, and when at last he opened his eyes, he seemed very imperfectly recovered. He answered Bob’s inquiry as to how he felt, and then sank back into a semi-stupor.

Lizzie gave it as her opinion that he had better be left to recover in quiet, and Bob withdrew with her to the kitchen. Anthony was still lying, apparently asleep, when, a

little after twelve, the elder brother appeared, making his entrance by the back-door. He was a house-painter, and happened to be at work so near his home that he had time to come to dinner. He was short in stature and thin, pale and pock-marked, with brows knitted over short-sighted eyes, which gave him a frowning, repellent aspect.

He greeted his brother warmly—more warmly than a prodigal might expect to be received. But Joe Dixon, though he would have shut his doors against a brother who had broken any other law, could not deal harshly with the man who had broken the Game-laws. He was an advanced Radical—indeed, he prided himself on being ‘advanced’ in his opinions on religion and politics; and he disliked the Game-laws so heartily that he inclined to consider the

poaching, which Bob had committed out of pure lightness of heart as a good bit of fun, a noble rebellion against a bad system.

Though he would not have taken that way of protesting against the system himself, he could not help respecting Bob for resisting it in a practical way; he hoped it showed that the youth had formed strong opinions on the subject; and in the character of a victim of injustice, Bob rose above the position of stupid younger brother which he had hitherto held.

Joe was therefore very benign in the first moments of reunion, and they sat down to dinner in much family harmony.

But when he was told that Bob had brought one of his 'partners in distress'—a man who had not been poaching—under his roof, he was not well pleased. He had no notion of having gaol-birds in his house;

and he made a few sensible remarks about the necessity for prudence in the choice of acquaintances, and expressed surprise that Bob didn't hold himself too good to associate with characters of that kind.

When Bob warmly defended Mr. Lingen, he fell abruptly from his pedestal. He was no longer one who had suffered by combating unjust privileges; he was simply the dull boy whom Joe had always admonished and despised, and his opinion was not worth considering.

The elder brother gravely warned him against being drawn in by disreputable persons. Bob injudiciously declared that his prison acquaintance was a thorough gentleman, and this only increased his brother's prejudice against him. Mr. Dixon was at no time an admirer of gentlemen as gentlemen. He objected to

regarding them as his betters, and, as a good democrat, held strongly that all men were equal. He insisted so much on the doctrine of equality that he quite lost sight of another article of his creed—that of fraternity. In his zeal against class distinctions, he forgot that his so-called superiors were his brethren, and had no fraternal feeling to spare for them.

‘Well, I hope you’ll have nothing more to do with him after this, Bob,’ he remarked. ‘I’ve no opinion of your gentlemen thieves, and by what you say, that’s what this Mr. Lingen is.’

‘He’s only staying here till his faintness goes off,’ said Bob gruffly. ‘He isn’t a thief, and I’ll thank you not to call him one. If you knew him you would know better. You needn’t grudge him house-room for an hour or two. He’ll go away directly.’

‘Joe’s in one of his tempers,’ remarked Bob, when his brother had departed to his work.

Mrs. Dixon shook her head expressively. Joe’s tempers were acknowledged to be peculiar.

‘He’ll be all right when he comes back,’ she said, with the confidence of experience. ‘He soon gets over it. Just go and see how he,’ nodding towards the front room, ‘is now, Bob, and ask if he’d like a cup of tea.’

‘I don’t know what to make of him,’ said Bob, returning. ‘He isn’t asleep, for his eyes aren’t quite shut; but he took no notice when I spoke to him.’

‘Can he have fainted again?’ cried Lizzie.

She hastened to apply restoratives, but this time they had no effect. Cold water

did not rouse him ; burnt feathers were of no good. She tried to force some drops of whisky down his throat, but he did not swallow the stimulant ; she rubbed whisky on his hands and temples, but the death-like unconsciousness was not stirred. He lay pale, cold, breathing faintly and irregularly ; and the two lookers-on grew much alarmed.

‘Run for the doctor, Bob!’ cried Lizzie at last. ‘I can’t do anything. It’s more than a faint. Run for the doctor ! There’s one in Queen Street—he’s the nearest.’

Bob was off at once. He returned speedily. The doctor was out, but he would come shortly. But they looked for him in vain all the afternoon ; and when Joe returned from his work at half-past five, he heard with much disgust that his house was not yet free of the intruder.

‘Hang that chap!’ he cried pettishly.
‘Is he here still?’

‘He’s ill, I tell you,’ said Lizzie.

Joe muttered something about shamming.

‘Very likely he is,’ said Lizzie calmly.
‘Go and look at him, and see for yourself.
Me and Bob aren’t such good judges as
you are. P’r’aps you’ll find out that there’s
nothing the matter.’

‘He looks very bad,’ said Bob, in a
broken voice.

‘He hasn’t spoken a word nor noticed a
thing since you went out,’ added Lizzie.

‘Why upon earth haven’t you got the
doctor to him?’ said Joe, getting uneasy.

‘Bob’s been for him twice, and he hasn’t
come yet.’

‘I wish you would come and give him a
look, Joe,’ said Bob, and Joe yielded.

The little peppery, sharp-tongued man

had a very tender heart, and when he saw the motionless white face, pity overcame him. The boyish look which still lingered on the features, and the young man's piteous position—ill and helpless among strangers—appealed irresistibly to him. He came out with a grave, anxious expression, and he was just setting out on a third quest for the doctor, when that gentleman reached the house.

He examined the patient, asked a few questions as to the time and manner of the seizure, and, to Lizzie's amazement, made no attempt to rouse him.

'Can't you bring him round, sir?' she asked.

The doctor shook his head.

'He will be unconscious like this for some time,' he said. 'You had better get him to bed as quickly as possible.'

‘Would you step into the kitchen, sir?’ said Lizzie hastily. ‘You’d better speak to my husband about it.’

‘What’s the matter with him?’ demanded Joe, when the doctor entered the kitchen.

‘The brain is affected.’

‘Is he very ill?’

‘It is a serious attack. What is his name?’

‘Smith,’ said Joe promptly.

‘It would scarcely do to move him,’ said the doctor.

Lizzie’s face fell, and she looked in some alarm towards Joe.

‘We don’t want him to be moved,’ said the master of the house tartly. ‘The poor fellow’s here, and we must do the best we can.’

‘Well, you must charge him for all this trouble,’ said the doctor, who supposed that

the patient was a lodger in the house, and was much too full of thoughts of more important matters to notice any incongruity between the young man's appearance and his supposed quarters. 'Keep him as quiet as you can.' And after giving a few directions about the treatment of the invalid, the doctor departed.

Lizzie stood by the fire after he had gone, waiting to hear what Joe would say. In spite of his declaration to the doctor, she expected an outpouring of wrath on Bob's head, and an expression of general disgust at having the necessity of taking a stranger in forced upon them. She was vexed and worried herself to think of the trouble which she would have, and she was prepared to say ditto to her husband.

Joe spoke, and his accents were dulcet and mild.

‘You’ll have to give up your bed, Bob,’ he said. ‘I suppose it’s all ready, Lizzie, and me and Bob can carry that poor fellow upstairs.’

‘Yes; the bed’s ready,’ said Lizzie, in great amazement.

‘We’ll get him up then,’ said Joe, ‘and then we’ll have our tea.’

Joe’s compassion had conquered every other feeling. He might grumble later, when he realized in full detail what he was undertaking; but for the present he was almost as much interested in Mr. Lingen as Bob himself, and he was ready to do all he could for him.

Anthony could not have fallen into better hands. Lizzie Dixon was a capable, energetic woman, and she nursed him carefully and kindly. No one was told who their new inmate was; and it was the easier to

maintain secrecy on this point, because the Dixons were not given to gossip with their neighbours. They had few acquaintances, for they came from the north of England, and had not been long settled in the town.



CHAPTER III.

‘Thou shouldst desire to die, being miserable.’

Timon of Athens.

YOUNG Lingen lay unconscious for some days. Once the doctor said : ‘If he has any relations, you had better let them know how ill he is;’ but his advice was not taken.

The Dixons had had no difficulty in discovering what relations their guest had in the town. A few inquiries brought Joe the information that they were only distantly related, and that they had all cast the culprit off at the time of his disgrace. Joe

therefore decreed that no communications should be made to these kinsfolk, arguing that when the poor fellow recovered, it would be unpleasant for him to find that any appeal on his behalf had been made to his people.

‘They’ll give him money, mebbe,’ said Joe, ‘and fling it to him as if he was a dog; or, just as likely, they’ll say he may go to the workhouse. Cousins don’t count for kin; and when they could go and put him in prison—damning a poor chap for life—I wouldn’t take a farthing from ’em.’

‘Mr. Lingen said hisself that not a soul he knew would look at him now,’ said Bob, ‘and it would none please him to take charity from them.’

‘Ay, ay; that’s what such folks are!’ said Joe. ‘They’ll always kick a man

that's down. We'll do better for him than his own.'

Joe smoked placidly with the consciousness of virtue, pleased to do a generous deed, for he had a double share of the kindly instincts of the North-country peasant; and specially pleased to do this, because he felt that he was sheltering one on whom Joe's enemies—his betters—turned their backs. It gave him satisfaction to reflect that old Mr. Lingen, who ought to have succoured his young cousin, was a regular chapel-goer and a deacon, and yet in humanity was inferior to the painter, who was a secularist.

'Well, Joe, there's this to be said,' observed his wife, 'it's expensive having a sick man in the house.'

'Bless my soul, we shan't be beggared by that!' said Joe, rather angrily.

‘And if his relations gave something to pay the doctor’s bill, it would be so much gained,’ went on Lizzie, who was not at all afraid of her husband’s temper, and was not to be put down.

‘They’ll not pay enough to make it worth while to ask for it,’ quoth Joe. ‘That old Lingen’s a screw—a regular screw, folks say—and it isn’t likely he’ll put his hand in his pocket. I never asked anybody for a penny yet—any gentlefolks, I mean ; I’ve borrowed from other chaps now and then—and I’m not going to begin. We’ve had to take this poor fellow in ; we couldn’t do otherwise. You wouldn’t have turned him out of doors, lass ?’

‘Why, no ; of course I wouldn’t.’

‘And what I do, I’ll pay for,’ said Joe, ‘and ask no man’s leave or help. I wouldn’t have these folks pay all the

expenses of this poor lad's illness as they'd do it. Coming and prying to see as he has all he should have, and poking their noses into one's house to make sure that none o' the brass goes into my pocket ! Nay, nay ; we'll keep our house to ourselves, and no gentlefolks cross my door to ask what I'm doing. An Englishman's house is his castle,' said Joe, with the air of a person who is making a striking quotation.

' There's something in that,' agreed Lizzie, who shared her husband's tenacious dislike to intrusion by strangers. ' And comin' as he did, I don't see how we could help taking him in. But if he should die ?' she added.

' Why, then we can tell old Lingen who prosecuted him, and make the old brute ashamed of himself, for it's he that's druv the poor fellow to his death,' said Joe, thinking

with some complacency of a dramatic scene in which he should announce to the rich and hard-hearted oppressor of the poor—in the person of his own kinsman—the result of his harsh persecution.

‘I hope it won’t come to that, though,’ said Lizzie. ‘He seems rather better to-night.’

Slowly Anthony revived. The stupor passed away very gradually, and he began to take notice of his surroundings. Once when the doctor was paying him a visit, he looked at him with more intelligence than he had shown yet, and said almost eagerly :

‘Am I really very ill?’

‘You’ve had a pretty sharp attack.’

‘Shall I get better?’

The doctor was of course accustomed to these appeals, and he always answered them

hopefully. He held that you might as well give an invalid poison as tell him that the chance of recovery was small; and he maintained that you ought to keep up a sufferer's hope and courage as long as possible—nature would break the truth quite soon enough if he was to die. In this case he confidently expected recovery now, and he was beginning a cheery reply, when his patient said:

‘Don’t you think I shall die?’ and to his amazement he saw that the young man positively had no wish to live.

‘Oh dear, no; I hope not,’ he answered hastily. ‘You will soon be better now. You must not give way to such gloomy ideas.’

Lingen sighed wearily. The faint light of expectation went out of his eyes, and he turned his head away feebly.

‘ You seem to think it is a pity that you are getting well,’ said the doctor, moved by curiosity. But he got no answer.

When Anthony fully understood where he was he seemed distressed by his position, and begged Bob to dispose of the valuables he had with him. But Joe stoutly refused to allow this, and was indeed loftily indignant at the suggestion. He was pleased with his own hospitality, and it hurt him to have his guest mention money. There was time enough to think of pawning or selling when the invalid was stronger ; meanwhile, what he had to do was not to worry himself, but keep quiet as the doctor said.

‘ And,’ added Joe, ‘ you’ll want money more later.’

‘ That’s true enough,’ said the sick man, with a sigh.

‘Now don’t you bother,’ said Joe.
‘We’ll settle our accounts by-and-by.’

‘You are wonderfully kind,’ said Anthony, looking at his host with a faint smile. ‘I have found a good Samaritan when I least expected it.’

‘Oh, you’ll find a lot that you don’t expect,’ said Joe gruffly, for that smile touched him, and he hated to be overcome in that way. ‘Lor’ bless you, what could we do? You wouldn’t have turned me out, would you, if I fainted in your house? There’s nothing to make a talk about.’

‘Lizzie,’ said Joe that evening, ‘where’s the story of the “good Samaritan”?’

‘Why, Joe, in the Bible!’ cried his wife, horrified at his ignorance.

‘Ay, ay, I know that. But whereabouts in the Bible? Just get it, and show me.’

Much surprised, Lizzie sought her Bible,

and after some search, handed it, open at the eleventh of St. Luke, to her husband.

‘What’s taken you to want it?’ she said.
‘I thought you didn’t believe in it.’

‘Lass,’ said Joe, ‘what’s that got to do with it? I don’t believe it’s what some folks say it is; but still it’s a book that one should know something on. And if one only read what one was sure one could believe, one would read precious little.’

He read the parable through, and nodded with satisfaction at the end.

‘I remember it fairly well,’ he said.
‘It’s bonny, too; it sounds like poetry. But I think we’ve done better. Taking him into one’s own house is more trouble than sending him to an inn.’

A little later Anthony, who was slowly gathering strength, bethought him of send-

ing Bob to his old lodgings to get the things he had left there. Bob did not find his errand a pleasant one. The landlady treated him with lofty disdain, as one who was connected with a disgraced person. She appeared to resent his coming, declared that she had had more trouble than enough about Mr. Lingen, and never wished to hear his name again. Bob was assured two or three times that never had she had such a shocking experience before as that of having a thief in the house; and he had to listen to a description of her sensations on the evening when a police officer had come to arrest her lodger, and had taken him away in a cab. Bob heard her out, and stolidly repeated a statement of his business.

‘There’s not so much,’ said the irate landlady, ‘for his uncle had some of his

things sold to pay the rent that was owing to me. A real gentleman he is, and awfully cut up about his nephew's wickedness; but, says he, "Mrs. Brown, I will not see you suffer. You have enough to bear without losing your money, and I will see you paid."'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Bob, 'but I'd like to have the things that you haven't taken. I have to send them to Mr. Lingen.'

It had been impressed upon Bob before he started on this errand that he must carefully conceal Mr. Lingen's whereabouts, and give the impression that he was not in the town.

'I taken? Young man, let me tell you as I had nothing to do with it. His uncle it was that ordered some of his things to be sold to pay his just debts, and not let a poor widow be robbed, though he had

been. "I will not see you suffer," he said. Those were his very words.'

'That's all right. Mr. Lingen will be glad you've got your money, ma'am. But there are some things left, you say, and he wants them.'

'You can have them. They're all packed and locked, and glad I shall be not to have them in the house, taking up room, for it's little I can spare. And there's a letter for him, too, that came this very morning. I was going to send it on to old Mr. Lingen.'

'Better give it to me. His uncle doesn't know his address, and I do.'

Mrs. Brown examined again the credentials which the messenger had produced—a sheet of paper, on which Anthony had written a request that she would allow the bearer to remove his things.

‘I suppose it will be all right,’ she said, ‘if I let you have them.’

She demanded Bob’s address, which was readily given, and then let him depart.

When on his return he produced the letter, Lizzie and Joe both gave it as their opinion that it should not be delivered to its owner yet. He was not able to bear any excitement at present, and must be kept as quiet as possible.

‘There won’t be anything pleasant in the letter,’ Joe pronounced. ‘It’ll be full o’ preachin’ and ratin’, telling him how he has disgraced himself, as if the poor chap didn’t know that. He shan’t be bothered till he’s picked up a little.’

So the letter was put away by Lizzie in the drawer where she kept things valuable enough to be locked up.

A day or two after, the Dixons were

surprised by receiving a visit from a young gentleman. Bob answered the knock, and admitted the caller to the parlour, where he and Joe were smoking their pipes, while Lizzie knitted a long grey stocking. Joe refused to sit in the kitchen on warm summer evenings; and spite of the remonstrances of his wife, who was dismayed at such a violation of her ideas of what was suitable, he would take the good of their best room. He could not see, he said, why he should stew in the kitchen beside the fire, when he could be cool and comfortable in the parlour; and when Lizzie urged that nobody ever sat regularly in their best room, he seized upon that fact as a reason why they should do so. It was well that somebody should break through such a senseless custom.

Therefore, when the young man stepped

in as soon as Bob opened the door, he found himself in presence of the whole family. Joe regarded him austere, suspecting at first that the intruder had come with an offensive design of doing them good. He had experienced some attempts at promoting his spiritual welfare, and he regarded them as gratuitous impertinence, and a part of that general readiness to interfere with the working classes and set up for their betters, which distinguish the middle and upper ranks.

‘They wouldn’t dare go into the house of a rich pawnbroker or innkeeper,’ growled Joe, ‘and ask whether he went to church regular, and say his house was beautifully clean. And I don’t see why they should give me such sauce. I’d like to kick them out of the place.’

Joe’s stare on this occasion was almost

as forcible a hint to depart as a kick could have been; but the visitor did not notice it, being already much embarrassed, and only anxious to say quickly what he had to say.

‘I—I just called,’ he said, looking at Bob, ‘to ask—I understood from Mrs. Brown that—Mr. Anthony Lingen was ill, and that you knew where he is. Could you tell me how he is?’

Bob fell back and looked at Joe. He felt that his brother’s powers of discourse were more equal to the occasion than his own.

‘Will you sit down, sir?’ said Joe, hospitality getting the better of churlishness the faster because this gentleman’s business was not what he supposed it.

‘Thanks, no—I’m rather in a hurry. I can only stay a minute. I was anxious to

know how my—that is, I knew Mr. Anthony Lingen—and I feel—sorry,’ making a pause before the last word, and uttering it with a jerk.

‘He’s been ill, sir,’ said Joe frigidly; ‘but he’s better now.’

‘Oh! You are sure he’s better?’

‘Sure and certain.’

‘I am glad to hear it. Could you give me his address?’

‘Not without his leave, and from what I understand he’s not anxious to give it.’

‘Well, perhaps it would be better not. Could you take him—or send him—a message from me?’

‘I dare say I could.’

‘If you would, tell him that some of his relations would be glad to help him, and send him—this,’ producing a sealed en-

velope, 'I should be much obliged to you.'

'I'll do it. Who shall I say has sent it? or perhaps it's written inside?'

'No, no; there's no need for him to know. It doesn't matter. Only say some of his relations—he will understand.'

'All right,' said Joe.

The young man put the envelope on the table, made a step towards the door, and then paused.

'Thank you for taking the trouble,' he said nervously. 'Good-night.'

There was a silence after the door had closed, which Bob broke.

'He seems a kind-hearted chap, yon.'

'Confound it!' said Joe pettishly. 'One has no peace o' one's life with strange folk in the house. Can't one sit in peace at night without being bothered?'

Finding his remark so ill received, Bob prudently forbore to pursue the line he had begun.

‘Who wants them coming in upon one, I’d like to know?’

‘Well, I’m sure *I* don’t,’ said Lizzie; ‘not folks like him.’

‘What fault have you got with him?’ said Joe, who at times, in the pressing necessity of opposing somebody, forgot to be moderately consistent.

‘I don’t like folks that can’t look you i’ the face,’ said Mrs. Dixon firmly; ‘and yon lad never looked at one of us fair and straight.’

‘He’s a relation,’ suggested Bob, ‘and mebbe feels a bit ashamed. But it looks well that he should do something for him.’

A snort from Joe.

‘Ay, they’ll give him some money to get him safely out of the way, but they won’t give a kind word along with it.’

‘My belief is,’ said Lizzie, ‘that that young man knows more about it than he chooses to tell. If he didn’t take the money himself that was laid to this poor lad, he knows who did.’

‘Stuff!’ cried Joe, with lofty contempt. ‘You women always go so fast; you never stop to find a reason.’

‘We’re fools, no doubt,’ said Lizzie; ‘but a fool may be right sometimes; and you mark my words, that young man’s mixed up with the business. He hasn’t an honest face—bless you, he doesn’t walk like an honest man! I wouldn’t trust him as far as I could throw him.’

‘That’s neither here nor there. Because

you wouldn't trust him, it doesn't follow that he's as bad as you make out.'

Lizzie only shook her head with profound meaning over her work.

When Anthony was out of danger, the doctor thought that he did not mend as fast as he should have done; there was a slowness in regaining strength which was not accounted for by his physical condition. He was young and had a splendid constitution; he ought to shake off the morbid state of depression which at first seemed caused by weakness.

To Anthony himself it seemed that he recovered with startling rapidity. Each day he could measure progress; each day he travelled further from that delicious time when he had lain half-unconscious, too weak to think or feel, so feeble that he could do little but sleep, and in his waking

hours cheat himself with dreams that this helplessness meant death. He was so tired of life, and a long sleep seemed the only thing he could desire.

But the extreme weakness passed away ; and with the power of thought came the painful realization of the life he had hoped to slip out of. It was most literally a mortal coil to him ; a dark confusion which crushed hope out of him ; a heavy burden which he must carry grudgingly and rebelliously. Yet since death would none of him, he must act like a man, and take up his responsibilities again. Though he hated to recover, he resolutely set himself, when once he knew that there was no escape for him, to act in the way which would make his recovery most speedy. He obeyed the doctor's rules ; he ate as much as he could ; he put aside as far as possible the thoughts

which depressed him. He could not and would not prolong the time when he must receive the charity of strangers.

As he grew stronger his melancholy deepened, and the gloom of his face and manner became more marked. Lizzie and Bob pitied him for his depression; but it worried Joe to see it—perhaps because Joe had more power of entering into such feelings than his wife and brother—and he grumbled freely at times at his own soft-heartedness in taking such a wet blanket into his house.

‘It shows a poor spirit,’ argued Joe, ‘for a chap to give way like that. He should pick up a bit of heart, and not mope as if he thought of cutting his throat. Why, if he’d done the thing, he might put a better face on it.’

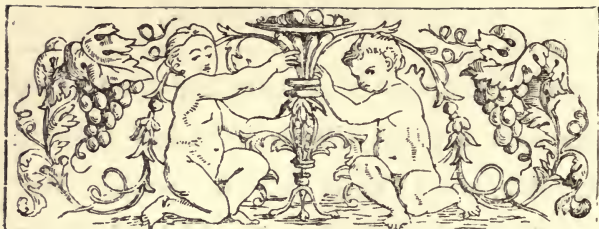
‘It’s every bit as bad for him as if he had

done it,' said Lizzie. 'It will always stand in his way.'

But though Joe spoke thus to his wife, he always treated his guest unexceptionably. His kindness was thoroughly genuine, if somewhat impatient now and then ; and he showed a consideration which made it as easy as it could be made to take his hospitality.

He not only pitied the poor young fellow, and firmly believed in his innocence ; but he had a liking for him. There were points in his character which were just what Joe could appreciate. He was pleased that he made no application to his relations for help in his straits. This might be called wrong-headed by many people ; but Joe's heart warmed to it, and he called it proper spirit and independence. He admired, too, his resolute abstinence from complaint. It

would have been impossible for Joe to keep up such a strict silence if he had been in trouble, and he respected the power. Best of all, he liked the way in which his guest accepted his kindness ; his undemonstrative gratitude and unfailing courtesy.



CHAPTER IV.

ANTHONY could not spare much time for his convalescence. The necessity of facing the future pressed upon him with returning strength ; and when the doctor declared that he needed no more professional visits, he felt that he must put an end to his inaction. He went out that day for the first time by broad daylight ; hitherto he had shrunk from appearing out of doors, and he had taken in the dusk the fresh air which was prescribed for him ; but to-day

he was preoccupied, and anxious to have quiet which should run no risk of disturbance. He went out in the afternoon—not the pleasantest time of day in July, but he preferred it to the evening, because there were fewer people to be met with then—and walked for some distance along the bank of the river on which Middleton stands.

As he walked, he thought of the life that lay before him, trying to imagine what he was to do with it, wondering what ways it would lead him through. His passive time was over; he must form some plan of action. It was all very well for the doctor to tell him that he must be careful not to exert himself: he must exert himself.

He must pull himself together, and begin the world again. It was a desperate busi-

ness enough as he looked at it. Here he was, four-and-twenty, beggared of character. He was weak and shaken with an illness which had left his nervous system in a peculiarly susceptible state. And he had very little money. He had come out of prison without a coin in his pocket. He had been offered the small sum which is bestowed on a discharged man, but he had refused it. Now his watch had been sold, and he had a few pounds which the sale had brought ; but he could not keep even the whole of that miserable sum. He must pay the doctor's bill, at least. As to the Dixons, they must be paid by instalments when he got work. It would be very little that he would take away with him ; he would know what want meant before long. His head was not equal yet to any effort of thought ; and he soon found himself power-

less to fix his mind to any practical considerations. He got confused and weary in the endeavour; the longer he pondered, the more deeply he felt that there was no way out of the pit he had fallen into.

He could see nothing but misery wherever he looked. One can bear anything as long as one has hope. But he had lost all hope: his ruin was complete. There was no motive strong enough to nerve him to fight his way: the most he could expect (and he was very doubtful about that) was to find some way of earning scanty bread, and human energy requires a more potent stimulant than such a prospect to call it out.

He sat down by the river-side presently, and mechanically watched the water; thinking of the time when he had rowed there, and thinking with a piteous, incredulous

wonder of the contrast between that time and this. His old self seemed far off and strange: he could scarcely realize his state when he had been gay and light-hearted, with no deeper trouble than the smallness of his salary, and an occasional attack of discontent at the little chance he had of ever doing much in the world. He had had flashes of ambition then, and wishes to make himself somebody. He remembered this now with the amusement which is more painful than regret. But what a happy fellow he had been! How sorry he would have felt for the poor wretch he was now! and he winced at the imagination of his dead self's pity. How was he to bear this load of shame?

As he watched the river, which was clear and deep there, a languid fancy came to him which one feels sometimes in gazing

down into pure water. How cool it was; how pleasant it would be to lie with that cold freshness about one and over one; how quietly one would sleep in it! The fancy laid hold of him and became more than a passing dreamy imagination: he thought of the peace and oblivion with a fascinated longing.

The water drew him. This would make a quick, sure way out of all his troubles. Here was nothing but hopeless, grinding poverty—for what employment could a man who had no character get?—a life which must sink lower and lower, a hideous struggle with coarse men for bare means of subsistence, till it ended in—God alone knew what it might end in. The gentleman who has dropped out of his proper place is infinitely worse off than the working-man. His knowledge is useless; his

manner inspires suspicion ; his refinement only serves to make him wretched. An outcast, he makes acquaintance with the waste places of civilization, and realizes the blackest possibilities which dog want and disgrace.

Anthony was cruelly conscious of what lay in store for him. What could he do, without money or friends ? How was he to set about making a living ? How was he to take the first steps ? And what good was his life to him that he should try to preserve it ?

The river would be better. He rose and walked to the edge of the bank, and looked down intently. The sun-rays turned the surface to gold. Through the clear air came the voices of children gathering flowers in a field at some distance. The calm of the afternoon, the deep sunshiny

blue of the sky, the brightness on the water, intensified his own black, chill misery, and made it unbearable.

He was forsaken by God and man. He stood outside of all brightness and sweetness; the very beauty, which he felt as if the throbbing wretchedness in his heart made his senses and perceptions keener, maddened him. Never—never—would he be able to look up with a light heart at the sky: never would the peace of Nature do anything but mock him by forcing on him the remembrance of the shameful, miserable past.

Ruined—disgraced—friendless! He was nearly mad: perhaps he was quite mad in his desperation, for he deliberately felt in that moment that suicide was good and advisable. He refused life, and chose darkness.

He gazed down into the water with a

certain exultation. He was not quite helpless ; he could fling away the spoilt, odious thing which his existence had been made. Let the guilt—if there was any—rest on the heads of those who were to blame for his extremity.

He was looking still when the sound of a footstep struck his ear. A man was approaching him — a slight, sickly-looking creature, who walked lame. He touched his cap and asked what time it was. Anthony saw him with a new, almost unbearable pang of pity. Here was another who seemed beaten.

‘I—I haven’t my watch on,’ he said hastily. ‘Where are you going?’ he added abruptly.

‘To the town, sir—to look for work. I’ve tramped from one place to another for the last month.’

‘That’s hard work for you.’

‘Yes; but I don’t mind it in summer. Looking for work in winter is worse.’

The uncomplaining patience of the tone struck Anthony.

‘Do you think you’ll find work here?’ he said.

‘I don’t know,’ was the answer, in almost an indifferent tone.

Anthony gave him a shilling, which was taken with a look of surprise and unfluent thanks. Then the man plodded onward in the sunlight, a weary, slouching figure, without lively hope or sharp despair. Anthony looked after him for awhile, and then followed to the town.

The mad impulse was over. If he had to be as unfortunate as this poor creature, who took disappointment and deprivation as his natural inheritance, he must at least

have as much courage. He did not say so in so many words ; he only felt that it was possible to live still.

He walked painfully back, through the poor streets which were noisy with children coming home from school. He had over-rated his strength, and he realized with painful completeness what bodily weakness is, before he reached his destination. He had never had an illness before, and this sense of powerlessness was horribly new and depressing. Like all men, he was easily dejected by physical discomfort ; and when he entered the Dixons' door, he was utterly worn out and wretched. Was his health ruined for good ? Was this sick giddiness, this almost terrified sensation of weakness to return often ? The dew stood on his forehead, he was shaking from head to foot, when he staggered into the little house.

‘You’ve stayed out too long, sir,’ said Lizzie compassionately. ‘There, lie down here, and I’ll get you some tea. You had better have a drop of whisky, meantime.’

Bob, who was at home, would have lavished clumsy attentions on the invalid; but Lizzie, having administered the whisky, frowningly signed to him to retire to the kitchen, and followed him there herself.

‘What use men make of their sense I’d like to know,’ she said wrathfully, as she stirred the fire into a blaze. ‘Poor, helpless creatures, it’s more than any woman can do to keep them from making fools of themselves. Here’s this lad got tired out, and’ll very likely have a back-cast and be ill again, when you’d think a child of ten would have been wiser than keep out so long. And now, when you see he’s that

weak and tired he isn't fit to be spoken to, you must stand gaping at him and asking him questions, and creaking about with those thick boots of yours, as though that would do him any good. Do sit down and keep quiet—out of a body's way! It's bad enough to do for one man; but three, and one of them bad, and another a fair fool—it's more than I can manage.'

Much subdued, Bob sat down meekly in silence.

'Do you think he'll get a back-cast?' he asked presently.

'How can I tell?' said Lizzie. 'He looks like a sheet. You can toast the bread for me, for he wants some good food.'

Bob accepted the toasting-fork with alacrity, and knelt down by the fire. When Mr. Lingen's tea was ready, he took off his

boots, and was going to carry the tray in ; but his sister-in-law forbade him.

‘ You’ll not disturb him till he’s had a sup of tea,’ she said decidedly. ‘ He isn’t fit to talk.’

The resolute young woman was more than a match for her big brother-in-law, and Bob yielded the point. Lizzie, entering the parlour, was convinced anew of the inferiority of the male intellect in some respects. For there was Joe, just returned from his work, talking to his guest ; ‘ though anybody might see with half an eye he was near fainting,’ said Lizzie to herself ; ‘ but men see nothing.’

‘ You’ll need money to go away with and start fresh,’ Joe was saying in a cheerful tone.

Lizzie did not know how peculiarly irritating this suggestion was ; but she

could see well enough the expression of pain on her patient's face, and she interposed.

'Here's your tea, sir. Now, Joe, tea is just ready.'

'All right ; I'm ready for it, too. But as I was saying, you can't get away without money, Mr. Lingen, and you'll mebbe like to hear that there is some for you.'

Mr. Lingen made no reply.

'A gentleman came here when you were ill, and left some with us to give you.'

'A gentleman ? What was he like ?'

'A young man—not very tall, light-haired—nothing much to look at.'

'What did he say ?'

'He said that this money was from some of your relations, and he was sorry to hear you were ill. It is in a sealed envelope. Lizzie's got it locked up. Just fetch it,

Lizzie, and let Mr. Lingen have it, and the letter too,' said Joe, with serene confidence that he was doing the right thing at the right time.

'I can't go now,' said Lizzie brusquely. 'Let's get our tea.'

'There's no hurry about the tea,' said Joe airily.

'Mr. Lingen should get his at once. He's too tired to be worried with anything just now.'

'Not he,' said Joe obstinately.

And Lizzie, seeing that nothing was to be done, gave up her point with a mental protest, and brought the sealed envelope and the letter downstairs.

'Do have some tea before you look at them, sir!' she urged, as she gave them to their owner. 'We didn't tell you before, because you were too weak to be bothered.'

Joe passed into the kitchen, a touch of something like good-breeding making him scorn to show any curiosity about his guest's private affairs ; but Lizzie lingered, because she really feared that a fainting-fit was inevitable.

Anthony opened the sealed envelope with nervous hurry. There were some bank-notes inside ; but not a scrap of writing.

‘ I thought so,’ he muttered, as he turned them over.

He threw them down on the table in a way which alarmed Lizzie, who regarded bank-notes as things to be treated tenderly and respectfully. One of them fluttered to the ground, and she picked it up and put it on the table. Anthony looked at her as she did so, and a change came over his face. He glanced from her to the money, as if a new train of thought had occurred to him,

and hesitated for a minute. Then he said :

‘ Will you keep this till I see how much of it I shall need to make up the money to pay you and the doctor? I must take some for that; you must not lose by me.’

He pushed it towards her. She drew back her hand.

‘ Leave it now, sir; you aren’t strong enough to think. Just get your tea.’

‘ Keep it for me. I don’t like the sight of it. When I know what I owe you, I can send the rest back.’

‘ Lord, sir, you’d better keep it for yourself !’

‘ If I was starving, and that money was offered me, I would prefer starvation to taking it,’ he said, in a calm, matter-of-fact way, which was more impressive than any violence. ‘ I hate it so much, that I would

rather not take any to pay you,' he added, half smiling.

'Don't talk of paying, sir. And do get your tea before it's cold. There, now, don't you mind about anything but getting well again,' said Lizzie, in a maternal tone, as she departed.

Anthony lay back in the reaction after the agitation which that money had stirred up in him. It had been brief, and he had given it little expression from sheer lack of physical power to do so; but this had not lessened the fierce disgust and loathing, the revolt against the unbearable injustice of his position, that shook him.

He could do nothing; he could not raise his voice in protest against the vile wrong that was done him; he could not find words for futile outpouring of his wrongs; he had no strength even to curse his enemy

aloud. The storm swept over him and left him helpless, with the hatred and thirst for revenge which only the helpless know.

Presently he moved a little, and sat up. The instinct of bodily need overcame everything else ; and he ate the food with a faint craving, which made part of the miserable despair he was enduring. It was horrible to be so at the mercy of one's physical sensations. Would this illness drag him so low that he would be forced to keep that money ? He shuddered. ' Never, never ! ' he said to himself—' never while I can remember ! It is only fair that he should pay for *this* : it is his own work, and he takes the profit. He should bear some of the expense. And it would not be right to keep in debt to those people. I can pay him back later. But I will not touch another penny of it.'

He was left alone at Lizzie's express command, which, backed up by dark threats as to what might follow if the invalid was further fatigued that evening, restrained even Joe's fidgety spirit of self-assertion. The men went out for a walk, and Lizzie knitted in the kitchen.

Anthony lay too weary to sleep or think. His impotent rage passed away; he was too sick at heart to indulge it long. The utter destruction that had laid waste his life was present to him, and he passively contemplated it without any conscious exertion of his mind.

It grew dark outside, and Lizzie came in softly to see whether her charge wanted anything, and finding him awake, lit the gas and drew down the blind. Anthony would have preferred the dusk, but he did not feel at liberty to interfere. He was only

there on sufferance ; he was not important enough to have his fancies consulted : the time when he might command would never come.

It was a very small matter, being roused in that way ; but it seemed to bring him a poignant realization of his fall. His life was spoilt, down to the minutest details. The little room, the light which dazzled his weak eyes, the feeling that he was not at home, made the bitterness in his heart bitterer. The masculine inability to endure patiently made it all the worse for him ; he did not know how to take his wretchedness. He could have cried like a girl, with sheer weariness and disgust, and a yearning for comfort. And all the comfort he could reach was given by the homely woman, who fretted him by making such a noise as she drew down the blind.

‘How do you feel now, sir?’ said Lizzie.

‘Better, thank you.’

‘You are getting on well; you’ll soon be quite better,’ she said cheerily.

She had no second meaning, but Anthony thought: ‘They’ll be glad to see the last of me;’ and while he acknowledged fully that he had been treated with marvellous kindness, it was an additional drop of gall to know that he had to be dependent on kindness to which he had no claim.

He sat up on the couch, and seeing the letter lying on the table, he took it up. It had to be read; and he might as well read it then. There would be something unpleasant in it; perhaps an outburst of reviling from one of his few relations, upbraiding him with the disgrace he had brought upon himself, and solemnly renouncing him; or perhaps it was a bill.

The envelope looked like a bill—a bill which he would pay—when? He was a little in debt—not deeply—but enough to add to his humiliation in his own eyes.

He opened the envelope slowly and wearily, without looking at the post-mark, prepared for another taste of bitterness, and feeling languidly indifferent to whatever it might be.

He read the letter—read it once, twice, thrice; then it dropped from his hands, and he burst into tears. If it had come a year ago, it would have saved him. That was his first emotion: keen disappointment and rebellious wonder why, if this was to happen, it should come too late. It was a stroke of irony now.

His emotion was quickly spent, and he started up with a vague notion of doing something at once, of taking some step.

He would have a great deal to do, and now he had power to act.

He looked round the poor little room with the kindest feeling he had had yet for it. His querulous impatience of his surroundings was gone, and warm gratitude for the humanity that had given him shelter took its place. He did not chafe at being indebted, for he could pay his debts with interest; and it depended on his own will how long he stayed there. He was free to do as he chose—free as he had never been in his life before.

There was one thing that he could do that night; and he went to the door and asked Mrs. Dixon for writing materials.

‘I have to answer this letter,’ he said, in a tone which she had not heard from him before.

There was reviving life in it.

‘I hope it’s good news, sir,’ said Lizzie, as she set what he wanted before him.

‘It is as good news as I can hope to get now,’ he answered. ‘I have had some money left me.’

‘Eh, sir, but that *is* good news! I’m glad to hear it. That’ll start you fair somewhere else.’

‘Thank you. I shall need no help now to pay you the debt I owe you. I can’t pay you for the kindness, but I can partly make up for the trouble you have had.’

‘There’s no hurry about that, sir,’ said Lizzie.

There was a slight change in her manner already, a shade of respect for the person who had had money left him, which she had not shown to the needy convict.

‘Oh, but there is,’ said Anthony. ‘I must think of it now. I must go to

London at once to see about this business. I shall start to-morrow.'

He wrote his letter to the lawyer; and Bob, coming in, undertook to hurry with it to the General Post Office, as it was too late for the pillar-boxes.

Joe expressed his satisfaction at seeing his guest look brighter.

'Mr. Lingen has had real good news,' said Lizzie. 'He's had some money left him.'

'I'm glad to hear it,' said Joe. 'I hope it's enough to do you some good.'

'It's enough to make me independent for life.'

Joe whistled.

'Shall you be rich?' he asked, rather curtly.

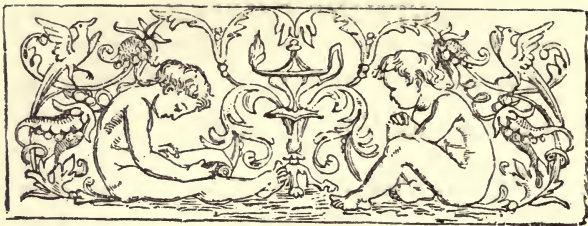
'Yes, I believe I shall. I don't know quite how much I shall have, but it will certainly be riches to me.'

‘Ay, you wouldn’t get a good screw in that warehouse, I’ll be bound.’

‘Very far from it.’

‘I suppose you’ll go out of England to live.’

‘I—I haven’t thought yet what I shall do ; but I suppose—yes, that will certainly be best for me.’



CHAPTER V.

NEXT day Anthony went to London. He travelled by the first train; he was full of uncontrollable impatience to leave the hateful scene of his disaster behind him. In his eagerness, he rather hurt the feelings of the Dixons, for he seemed to think of nothing but how he could get away most speedily; and when you have done a man a great service, it is somewhat obtuse on his part to show an irrepressible desire to leave you. Lizzie made excuses for his abruptness; but Joe

did not like to see him rush away as if it was a deliverance.

‘Of course he’s glad to go, but he needn’t be in such a desperate hurry, as if he hated every extra half-hour here,’ said Joe that evening. ‘I suppose he’ll forget all about us now, or anyway think that we didn’t do very much for him. Very likely we’ll never hear of him again after he’s paid us. This is what comes of making a fuss about a gentleman, Bob.’

And Joe relieved his feeling of injury by worrying poor Bob, who was sad at seeing the last of his friend, and had not spirits to make any defence against the attack. He only shook his head and occasionally sighed, as Joe made unpleasant remarks about ingratitude, and the folly of showing any kindness to folks who thought themselves above you.

It was a fine summer morning when Anthony took his departure. The level, early sunshine was breaking through a delicate haze; the sky was clear; the air that came in at the open window, as the train swept smoothly onwards, was fresh with the coolness of the first morning hours and fragrant with country scents.

No journey was ever more pleasant than that. Anthony never forgot the peculiar delight of it—the feeling that every minute was taking him away from old associations, that he was leaving behind all the fetters which the past had fastened on him.

This was his release. His day of freedom before had only been the beginning of freedom in name. Then he had, as he believed, entered upon the second part of his punishment, the longest and the hardest,

a long endurance of want and ignominy. But now he had escaped that bitter servitude; and in the first intense relief, he felt that he could forget all that had happened, and make what he chose of his life.

He felt bright and hopeful; his youth asserted itself; it seemed already that his dark yesterday was far off. The commonplace features of the country through which he passed were beautiful to him; the bright green of the fields where the hay had been cut, the darker green of the trees and hedges, the glimpses of water flashing in the sun, gave him that intense enjoyment which one feels when, after the agitation of a painful crisis has spent itself, one comes back to the sensations of 'plain daylight life,' and simple pleasures thrill one with surprise and thankfulness.

By the time he reached London, the

rapture of the first relief was over. He was weak and easily fatigued, and he was wondering whether the lawyer whom he must see knew his story, and dreading to face him. However, it had to be done, and the sooner the better. He went to an hotel, and after he had eaten and rested, he set out, first nervously examining himself in a glass to see how long his hair was. It was quite long enough for the most respectable member of society; the dark crisp waves could not possibly excite any suspicion.

The lawyer's greeting set him at rest. Mr. Newton was evidently ignorant of anything to his client's discredit. He was very civil, if somewhat anxious to get their business done quickly; he was too busy to take any but the most limited professional interest in his new client. He gave the impression of thinking that the money which

Anthony had inherited was rather insignificant; and he casually mentioned two or three people whom he did business for, who certainly put Anthony and his new possessions into the shade. Even lawyers have their little weaknesses and vanities, and Mr. Newton was proud of his wealthy and aristocratic *clientèle*.

But Anthony's standard of comparison was not formed by acquaintance with the estates of peers; and he was surprised to find how rich he was, as Mr. Newton told him how so much was invested here, so much there. He would have far more than he had expected. It was strange to think that only yesterday it had been very doubtful whether he could ever earn a bare living.

The money came to him from a distant relation of his mother—an old single lady whom he had known nothing of till two

years ago, when she had found him out and written to him, claiming kinship, and asking him to pay her a visit at a seaside place where she was staying. He had spent a few days with her, having no idea that he was there on inspection, and that on the impression he made, his future fortune depended. He was not even aware, at that time, that Miss Fairfax had more than a modest competency. He had pleased his old cousin. She thought him a steady, well-principled young man, who was not likely to squander money recklessly; and she liked his manner to herself, for he had the finest grace of manliness, a great respect for a woman advanced in years.

She was not a person given to enthusiastic likings, and she did not adopt him on the spot and make him a handsome allowance; she made no attempt to im-

prove his position then. She merely paid his expenses, and gave him a present of money, saying that she was nearly enough related to him to make him such gifts. When he had gone, she burnt a will which she had had made, and resolved that an older one should express her last wishes. It left her property to her cousin, Mary Fairfax, daughter of Edmund Fairfax, or her heirs; and she put with the document a paper, giving the name of the only child of Mary Fairfax.

Occasionally afterwards she wrote to Anthony — short, kindly, formal notes. Her letters had stopped some three months before his trial. Now he was told that she had fallen ill then, and had been a helpless invalid till the time of her death, nailed down by paralysis, and slowly losing power of speech and thought.

‘We found your address among her papers,’ said Mr. Newton. ‘I suppose you had changed your lodgings, as you were so long in replying to our letter.’

‘Yes; I was not there. And I—I had been ill, and the letter was not given me at once.’

‘I was just going to send some one to make inquiries as to your whereabouts,’ said the lawyer.

Anthony mentally thanked Providence that these inquiries had not been made, and Mr. Newton went on with the business details.

‘There is the property in Kent; Miss Fairfax owned some land there, and the Manor House at Cheynehurst. She had it managed by an agent; she took no personal interest in it. The house is let at present furnished, and the lease has a year

or so to run. I should advise you to keep on the same agent as Miss Fairfax employed, as you cannot live there for the present.'

Anthony intimated his intention of taking Mr. Newton's advice. He certainly could not live there—for the present.

'There is another thing,' said Mr. Newton, when he had finished his account of the Fairfax property. 'Miss Fairfax expressed an intention in a letter to us of imposing one condition on you—that you should take her name. She meant to add that to her will, but it was never done. She put it off till she was in no state to do business. You are not obliged to do it; but perhaps you may not object to carry out her wishes.'

'Not at all. I am quite willing to take the name.'

In as short a time as might be, the formalities were gone through which put Anthony in possession of his inheritance. The first use which he made of his wealth was to express his gratitude to the Dixons. He would have liked to bestow largesse upon them unsparingly, but Joe stoutly refused to take more than such payment as might reasonably be demanded for lodging and attendance. He fixed the sum himself, and Anthony had enough comprehension of Joe's peculiar temper to yield to him. He understood that Joe's pride and independence would be sorely wounded by the offer of large money gifts; and he only indemnified himself by adding to his payment a valuable gift for husband and wife, to be kept in remembrance of him.

Bob was still out of work. His poaching was bringing him heavier consequences

than he had anticipated — consequences which he felt dimly were really unreasonably hard punishment for his offence. He had had no serious meaning when he got into a scrape ; it had been a mere freak, entered upon because he had a few unoccupied weeks between leaving one place and going to another ; and, being very dull, he craved diversion. He had gone out for a night, chiefly to see what it was like ; and ill-luck ordained that his party should fall in with the gamekeepers, and, with strong personal spite against Bob, that he should be caught.

Anthony proposed that Bob should go to America ; and the youth acquiesced gratefully in the plan, and came up to London that he might be properly fitted out and started. While he was there, a slight indisposition laid Anthony up for a few days, the

natural effect of excitement and exertion while he was still weak. When he was confined to his room, Bob appointed himself, as a matter of course, his chief attendant. He was an awkward one in some ways, but his patience and tenderness were unwearying; he never forgot anything; he was ready at every call; he ran errands; and Anthony would have been badly off without him. He slipped into the position of Anthony's servant, and left England in that capacity.

PART II.





CHAPTER I.

‘A face with gladness overspread !
Sweet looks, by human kindness bred !’

WORDSWORTH.



PRETTY group was on the lawn of Cheynehurst Vicarage, engaged in a game of tennis.

Mr. Clare, the Vicar, who had come out of the side-door, stood on the steps, looking at the picture, and admiring at least one figure in it. Three of the players were small boys, who are not particularly charming, as a rule, to their father; but the fourth was attractive enough to please eyes

more critical than those of a man who saw in her his first-born child and only daughter.

It was not merely paternal vanity which made Mr. Clare look with pleasure at the slight figure, noting the graceful lines as she sprang forward with upraised racquet, the easy motion, the alert poise of her head.

Turning to see which way the ball had gone after a very wild hit of one of the boys, Beatrice saw her father, and came running over the lawn towards him.

‘Oh, papa,’ she said, with some consternation in her voice, ‘I thought you were out! I hope we haven’t disturbed you with our noise?’

‘You have not disturbed me at all,’ said Mr. Clare. ‘I am just going out; but

there is a button wanting on this pair of gloves, and I can't find another.'

'I am so sorry! I carried off your gloves yesterday to stitch the buttons on more firmly. I will fetch you a pair.'

She disappeared within the house, and returned directly with the gloves.

'So careless of me not to put them back,' she said gravely.

She stood beside her father, swinging her racquet, as he slowly drew on his gloves. She was short and slight in form, but in her appearance there was none of the fragility which one generally associates with such a frame. On the contrary, there was a look of overflowing health about her. Her fresh, clear complexion, her bright eyes, her way of moving and walking—all told of perfect physical soundness, and an enviable power of enjoying life.

She had hazel eyes — large and clear, with a light of sunshiny mirth in them; a beautiful mouth with lips which smiled readily; dark lashes, and wide clear eyebrows. Her hair was brown, golden in the high lights; her hands and feet were small and delicately made.

Mr. Clare was a man of about the middle height, with a spare figure, eyes whose expression could be acute but was oftener indolent, and dark hair sprinkled with grey. There was very little distinctively clerical in his appearance, though he was attired in the orthodox manner; the regulation coat and white tie did not give him the professional stamp which they confer on most of their wearers.

‘Where are you going, papa?’

‘To the Manor House, for one place.’

‘Already?’

‘I must go sooner or later, Bee,’ in a tone of resignation; ‘and as I have to go to Thorn End to-day, it struck me that I might as well take the Manor on my way, and get it over.’

‘That is an economical arrangement.’

‘Exactly, and therefore it commends itself to me.’

‘I am glad you are going so soon. I thought you would put it off as long as you could; for you know, papa, you shirk calls of ceremony when you can.’

‘I fear I cannot defend myself against that accusation. My sense of duty is certainly dull with regard to calls.’

‘It is really noble of you to do what England expects of you so promptly and so cheerfully,’ said Bee, with a teasing glance.

‘Perhaps Mr. Fairfax will be out. That possibility supports me.’

‘Oh, I hope not ! I hope you will see him. I feel quite curious to know what sort of a person he is.’

‘It is a pity, then, that you cannot make my call for me, for my curiosity is very faint.’

‘But, papa,’ coaxingly, ‘do be very kind, and notice him carefully, so that you can gratify my curiosity.’

‘I will do my best. What are the special points which you are desirous of having information about ?’

‘Oh, I want to know all you can find out ! Nobody knows anything of him ; nobody here has seen him ; it is quite tantalizing. I am particularly anxious to know whether he intends to live at the Manor House.’

‘If he did come with that intention, I should think the first sight of the place would check it. It is a most uninviting dwelling.’

Bee looked across the garden through a gap in the evergreens, which divided it at one side from a meadow. The opening showed fields and orchards lying in the calm autumn sunshine. Here and there was an oast, and the hop-gardens, stripped of their green, looked dark and rather dreary. The ground sloped very gradually from the Vicarage, and then rose again. Upon the opposite slope there was a glimpse of a building through the trees. Only a few chimneys were distinctly visible; but Bee knew well enough the house which was hidden there by the foliage, and could see it as it looked—a great barrack of a place, with long rows of high narrow windows,

mostly shuttered, and a gloomy, forsaken aspect.

She shrugged her shoulders a little as she imagined the impression which anyone seeing it for the first time must receive.

‘It is a desolate abode,’ she said. ‘I shouldn’t like to live in it—as it is.’

‘It is only fit at present to be lived in by some one who is doing penance,’ quoth Mr. Clare.

‘Poor Mr. Fairfax! I hope he is not doing penance. The house could be made very comfortable if he took the trouble.’

‘It requires a vivid imagination to picture such a change. Perhaps I shall find that he has fled from the general mouldiness, and taken refuge at an hotel in Stonehurst. Let me see, he has had three nights already. One would drive me away.’

‘I look for better things. I hope he will stay, and bring his people here.’

‘If he has any.’

‘Oh, surely, papa! sisters and brothers if he is young, or nieces and nephews if he is middle-aged; and we shall have some pleasant neighbours. Now, if he shows an amiable inclination to like Cheynehurst, don’t discourage it.’

‘If he can like the Manor House, he is a remarkable person. He may certainly have forgotten to be fastidious, in his travels.’

Mr. Clare walked down the drive, and Bee accompanied him to the gate. She parted from him there, and ran back to the boys, who were getting impatient at her delay.

‘You’ve lost no end of time talking to papa,’ grumbled Eustace, the second, a pale boy about nine, with a sharp, querulous

tone in his voice, which told of a sickly constitution. 'Next thing we'll have to be going in, because you think the grass is getting damp.'

'It won't be time to go in yet,' said Bee reassuringly. 'We have plenty of time for playing.'

'We needn't go in when you have to, Eustace,' said Archie, the eldest, about a year older than Eustace. 'Alf and I don't catch cold directly.'

'Hush, Archie! we needn't talk of anybody going in yet,' said Bee, interposing before Eustace could utter his disgust at this flaunting of his brother's superiority.

But the play that afternoon was not to be uninterrupted. They had just started again, when the click of the gate was heard. The boys made grimaces expressive of their annoyance, and turned a gaze of

resigned anticipation towards the drive. They brightened up when a young lady came in sight.

‘It’s only Helen,’ said Eustace.

‘It’s not one of the old ladies, thank goodness!’ said Archie fervently.

Bee went to meet her visitor, and the two girls kissed each other warmly. Helen Carlyon had a tall figure, very beautifully formed; her features were regular; her complexion dazzlingly fair, with a lovely rose-tint. She had large dark blue eyes, with a wistful, appealing look in them, and a dreamy, half-sad expression of face. Her hair was much lighter than Bee’s; but it was scarcely bright enough to be called golden. She was twenty-one—just two years younger than Beatrice, and they were great friends. Bee, who had never had a sister, and had lost her mother some years

ago, was glad of the society of a companion of her own kind; and Helen, an orphan, who made her home with a childless aunt and uncle, was as glad of her affection.

‘Come and play with us, Helen,’ said Eustace politely.

‘But there are four of you already.’

‘You can play instead of Alf; he’s very little good.’

Alf, a square, sturdy boy, with big hazel eyes like his sister’s, set in a decidedly plain face, silently acquiesced in this proposal, and offered his racquet.

‘*I* don’t care,’ he said placidly, when Helen demurred. ‘You may have it, Helen; I’ll fetch the balls.’

When the boys at last were tired of tennis, and betook themselves to another part of the garden, Bee and Helen sat down and indulged in a little talk.

‘Do you know that Mr. Fairfax has come to the Manor House?’ said Bee.

‘No; I haven’t heard anything about it,’ said Helen indifferently.

Living in a village, surrounded by an atmosphere of gossip, Helen had acquired a strong contempt for that kind of talk. She thought it beneath the dignity of a reasonable human being to care for its trivialities; and to her mind, it was the one fault to be found with Bee that she did care to gossip, and could take a frank and hearty interest in the village doings, always remembered family events, and discussed comings and goings. It was a lamentable weakness in one who was capable of better things, and had intellectual interests.

‘Haven’t you heard? I thought you would be sure to have done so!’

Helen shook her head.

‘My aunt has been away for a week, you know. She only came home this morning. She is sure to hear any piece of news at once.’

‘Tell her this piece when you go home; I know she will be interested.’

‘Why?’

‘Dear me, Helen, don’t you know that Mr. Fairfax is specially interesting because he is the first Fairfax that has been near the place for years? The last owner took a dislike to the Manor House, and wouldn’t live in it; and it seemed as if the dislike had gone with the property, for this owner has stayed away a long time. It will make a great difference if he settles here.’

‘Yes; I suppose so,’ said Helen. ‘Where has he been living?’ she added, in the tone in which one puts a question which is intended to keep up the talk.

‘Nobody appears to know exactly. All that I hear is that he has been travelling. Mr. Hurst—the agent for the Fairfax property—talked of a journey round the world. At all events, he has been out of England for years.’

‘Well, I must be going,’ said Helen.

‘Can’t you stay to tea?’

‘My aunt will expect me back, thank you. I did not mean to stay so long when I came in. My visit was an impromptu one. I only came because——’

She stopped and coloured.

‘My dear Helen, don’t say that you didn’t come out of a desire to enjoy my society,’ said Bee laughingly.

‘It is rather cool, certainly, to make use of you; but the fact is, I came in to get rid of Mr. Martin. He joined me in the village, and he seemed to take it as a

matter of course that he should walk home with me. His conversation is not interesting, and I turned in at your gate to escape.'

'Quite right. I am glad our gate came in so opportunely. You would have suffered if he had walked the whole way with you talking about himself.'

'Ah, I should not mind that so much,' said Helen; then catching herself up, she said hastily: 'I must make haste, or my aunt will be vexed with me for staying out so long. And I should not like to annoy her, for she isn't very well just now. She is worrying about my uncle, because it was so stormy last week just after he started, and she will be anxious till she hears from him.'

'Poor Mrs. Carlyon! Yes, you ought not to leave her alone too long.'

‘One would suppose that she was hardened by experience to stormy weather,’ said Helen; ‘but she fidgets every voyage as though they had only just been married.’

‘Well, I don’t wonder at it,’ said Bee. ‘It must keep one anxious to belong to a sailor’s family. Don’t you fidget sometimes?’

‘Only when the weather is *very* bad indeed,’ said Helen. ‘I cannot get into a state of nervousness at every high wind. Life isn’t worth having at such a cost. So I take a hopeful view, and try to cheer my aunt, and she thinks me cold-hearted and callous.’

‘Will Captain Carlyon be away long?’

‘He is to come back some time in January.’

Helen said good-bye, and took her departure.

‘Something has vexed her,’ thought Bee, as she watched the slight graceful figure walk away. ‘She looked quite put out when she came first. I suppose Mrs. Carlyon has been worrying her about something. She is always irritable when she is anxious about her husband. Poor dear Helen! I wish she had a pleasanter home.’

Bee sighed a little as she thought how much better off she was than her friend—she, the mistress of her father’s house, always treated by him with proud, indulgent affection, with her three brothers to love and care for; while poor Helen had only her aunt and uncle, and had to pass the greater part of her time with Mrs. Carlyon, whose temper was occasionally uncertain.

Even in worldly things Bee had greatly

the advantage. She enjoyed the comfort and moderate luxury of easy means. The Carlyons were not so well off as Mr. Clare, and lived very quietly. Bee, as the clergyman's only daughter, was a much more important personage in the neighbourhood than Captain Carlyon's penniless niece.

Bee had none of the stolid selfishness in her nature which makes people give thanks that they are more richly endowed than others. She would have liked to see everyone else as happy as she was. 'I must have Helen here oftener and cheer her up,' was the characteristic resolution in which her thoughts of her friend ended. 'She likes coming here, and it always does her good.'

Then Bee strolled round the grounds in search of the boys who were very busy gardening, and ordered them into the

house. They left their work, and obeyed uncomplainingly; perhaps because it was tea-time. But, to do the young Clares justice, they were always obedient to their sister. She was the representative of authority to them. Mr. Clare was fond of quiet, and he had very little to do with his sons. The discipline lay in Bee's hands. Her father was the Court of Appeal, but it was very rarely that she needed to trouble him by invoking his authority. It was her business to keep the boys quiet and good, and prevent them from disturbing their parent's peace. This was her view of her duty, and she carried it out admirably.

After tea Archie produced the lessons which he had to prepare for the curate, who added to his income and filled up his time by acting as the boy's tutor, and

called upon Bee for help. Till the dressing-bell rang, she had to smooth his way through a bit of Cæsar, acting as dictionary and grammar in turn, and sternly refusing to listen to Archie's views upon the utility of studying the classics.

‘Now, papa, tell me all about it,’ said Bee after dinner, when the servant had withdrawn.

‘All about what?’ said Mr. Clare.

‘Your visit to the Manor House, of course. You must have found it pleasant, I should think, as you were so long away. I expected you much sooner.’

‘Ah, but I did not spend the extra time at the Manor,’ said Mr. Clare.

‘It is wrong to be curious and gossip-loving, no doubt, papa,’ said Bee, as he added no more; ‘but don’t you think it is almost as grave a fault to be unkind, as you are in keeping me on tenter-hooks in

this way? Tell me what I long to hear, and then you can lecture me for my narrow interests.'

'I ought also to give you a lecture on filial respect, young lady. Well, Bee, I will come to the point. I am very sorry for you. I am like the knife-grinder. "Story! I have none to tell." I have not made Mr. Fairfax's acquaintance.'

'Did your good resolutions fail?'

'No. I carried them out without once faltering. Having made up my mind to be a martyr to social duty, I marched to my figurative stake, without any weak attempt to postpone the infliction. But I was not admitted to the Manor House.'

'Oh dear, what a pity! Mr. Fairfax was out, then?'

'Well, strictly speaking, he was in; but I was told that he was not at home.'

‘How do you know he was in?’

‘I saw him go into the house as I went up the avenue. He crossed the lawn to the side-door.’

‘Rather rude to treat you so when you were making a first call,’ said Bee, with a little frown.

‘It might be inconvenient to see me just then.’

‘Still, he ought to have admitted you when he really was at home. Perhaps it was a mistake, and the servant thought he was out.’

‘No; it was Mrs. Hunter, the house-keeper, who opened the door, and I could see by her manner that he had given her directions. She was quite embarrassed at having to send me away, and having to tell me what she regarded as a falsehood. She stuck to the form that he was not at home,

and was careful not to say he was out, and she told me several times that she was very sorry.'

'Poor old thing! Is Mr. Fairfax old or young, papa?'

'Youngish, I should say; but I did not see his face. He has a youthful figure; but he walked in a slow, dragging way, not like a young man. I can satisfy your curiosity on one head: he is alone. I asked Mrs. Hunter, and she said there was nobody with him.'

'I wish you had seen him,' said Bee. 'It will be too disappointing if, after we have wished so long for a non-absentee owner of the Manor, he isn't nice to you.'



CHAPTER II.

IT appeared that Mr. Fairfax had no intention of being 'nice' to his Vicar. Instead of returning his call, he merely left a card, which proceeding seemed to Bee the height of rudeness, and rather surprised Mr. Clare himself. Either Mr. Fairfax was a confirmed lover of seclusion, or he did not intend to live at the Manor House. Under no other conditions could he afford to treat the Vicar so coolly. The other gentlemen of the neighbourhood who called had no better reception. 'Mr. Fairfax was not at

home,' said the servant; and at the latest day which etiquette allows, a return card was delivered at their door.

The village society felt itself injured. They had rejoiced at the prospect of having the Manor House inhabited, and had hoped for a sociable neighbour, who would give plenty of entertainments, and make the place gay. It did them no good to have a recluse at the house, who declined all offers of acquaintance, and shut himself up in gloomy solitude.

Perhaps Mr. Fairfax's eccentric conduct was as great a boon, in one way, to his new neighbours, as reckless hospitality could have been. It roused their curiosity and interest to a high pitch, and provided them with a topic which invited endless discussion, chiefly consisting in variations on the theme, 'I wonder—this, that, or the other.'

Mr. Fairfax was closely scanned when he was met out of doors. He was seen here and there, sometimes walking, but oftener riding, scarcely taking any notice of the people he passed. His appearance was voted to be very interesting ; his dark eyes had a peculiar melancholy in them which suggested a history, and he was handsome enough for a history of romantic incident.

He came to church regularly on Sunday, and behaved himself in an unexceptionable way during the service, keeping his eyes on his Prayer Book, and paying no attention to his neighbours. So complete was his absorption that Bee, who sat opposite him in the chancel, was disgusted at herself for casting one or two curious glances at him.

Bee heard scraps of gossip daily about

the new owner of the Manor House. The servants there, of course, talked to their friends, and every bit of information—however trivial—was eagerly caught up, discussed, and embroidered, till the first person who gave it would not have recognised it. One might have known what Mr. Fairfax usually ate at breakfast ; it was known by many that he did not care for sweets at dinner, and drank very little wine ; also that he sat up later at night than the ‘best-regarded’ people of the village were accustomed to do.

‘I do wish,’ said Bee one day to her father, ‘that Mr. Fairfax would come out of his seclusion, and stop the talk about himself. I am tired of hearing these conjectures as to what must be the cause of his hermit life. Mrs. Holmes thinks that he must be a member of some secret society,

and is occupied in making dynamite in the cellars of the Manor House.'

'I shouldn't have given her credit for so much imagination,' observed Mr. Clare.

'I was amazed at her boldness in starting such a theory. She thinks he must be a Nihilist or an Irish conspirator ; she rather inclines to the fancy that he is both: anyhow, she is sure that he has some very good reason for preserving such a strict and mysterious retirement. I wish that Mr. Fairfax would visit his neighbours like an ordinary member of society, or go away.'

'I hear that he intends to do the latter.'

'Who told you so, papa ?'

'I met Hurst this morning, and he said that Mr. Fairfax only came for a short stay.'

'I am glad he is going.'

'That is somewhat ungrateful of you,

Bee. You have got many a half-hour's gossip out of him.'

'Oh yes; I acknowledge that! Helen has despised my frivolity more heartily than usual. I was very glad of Mr. Fairfax's eccentricities at first: they were a pleasant change from the ordinary gossip, and being new, they interested me more than Mr. Moore's flirtations, or the Hammonds' last entertainment. But I have had enough of Mr. Fairfax, papa. I know all that there is to be known about him, and the whole is really not remarkable. The last item is that Tom Hammond met him strolling in a lane, smoking. He didn't speak to Tom; he "glared upon him and went surly by," like the lion in "Julius Cæsar."'

'It is well he is going,' said Mr. Clare, 'for he is doing no good in the parish.'

‘Does he acknowledge its existence?’

‘He has been visiting some of the poor people, and giving them money in a most injudicious way. He has found out that knot of miserable cottages near Thorn End, and has done his best to demoralize the inhabitants. They are a lazy, drunken set there; and they should not be encouraged by reckless almsgiving.’

‘Still it is good of him to be generous.’

‘It would do more good if he would give the money through me. There are plenty of people in the village who deserve help; but he has ingeniously hit upon the least independent he could find.’

‘Why don’t you write to him, papa, and beg him to stop his demoralizing course?’

‘Well, when a man has as nearly as possible cut you, you don’t feel at liberty to offer him advice.’

‘You would be glad to do him good, but you must be excused till you are introduced.’

‘Just so. I might overcome my scruples about etiquette if he were going to live here ; but as it is, he will not have time to do much harm.’

That afternoon Mr. Clare paid a visit to the old man who lived in the lodge at the Manor. He was ill and near his end, and the Vicar went frequently to read to him. He was just finishing the part of the Visitation of the Sick which he thought the invalid could attend to, when the door opened, and a gentleman came in. It was Mr. Fairfax. He stopped short at once, and hastily began an apology.

‘Come in, sir—come in !’ said old Humphrey.

‘I have just finished,’ added Mr. Clare,

‘and I am going. Pray don’t let me drive you away.’

Mr. Clare had a pleasant smile, and an address which was very attractive. Few people did not take a liking to him at first sight.

‘I’m glad to see you, sir,’ went on old Humphrey. ‘I’ve been telling the Vicar what a good landlord we’ve got in you.’

Mr. Fairfax uttered an inarticulate disclaimer of this praise, and after asking the old man how he was, said he would not talk to him then, and departed. Mr. Clare followed him downstairs, and made a remark or two as they stood in the little porch, such as strangers address to each other.

‘I am glad to see you,’ said Mr. Fairfax, in rather a constrained tone; ‘I was thinking of calling on you before I went away. I wished to consult you about some of the poor in the village.’

‘Are you walking my way?’ said Mr. Clare. ‘You might make your call now. I am going home.’

‘Thank you.’

He turned with the clergyman, and they walked side by side. He began at once about the points on which he wanted advice; and Mr. Clare was surprised at the thoroughness with which he had apparently studied the condition of the village. Somehow or other he had picked up a good many facts about the poor, and he was prepared to do much more to improve their state than Mr. Clare had dreamt of in his wildest flights of fancy. He was eager to have as many as might be persuaded to emigrate, and when Mr. Clare said:

‘You forget that these people couldn’t raise money enough easily to pay the

railway fare for the whole family to London,' he said carelessly :

' Oh, the money can be found if they will go.'

' Found—where?'

' I would let them have it,' he said, in a matter-of-course tone.

Mr. Clare became deeply interested ; not so much in the talk as in his interlocutor. He had a deep scepticism as to the advantage of such plans, which perhaps was partly caused by his professional acquaintance with the condition of the poor. He had no firm belief in the power of any outward means to raise the needy.

' What can you do?' he would say hopelessly, ' with a man who regards it as a necessity of nature that he should be helped to maintain his family?'

But though he did not suppose that his

parishioners could be much improved, he was pleased with this enthusiast who was so liberal and so inexperienced; and they became quite friendly as they talked. Mr. Fairfax was altogether unlike what Mr. Clare would have supposed him to be. There was no churlish stand-offishness in his behaviour, no disagreeable coldness or stiffness. He was simple in his manner, and remarkably devoid of the self-consequence which one might expect to find in a man who had enjoyed a large fortune only for a few years.

The Vicar took him to his study; and there they smoked and talked for a length of time which was beyond any limit usual for a first visit. When at length Mr. Fairfax discovered that he had stayed long enough, Mr. Clare's 'Must you go?' was much honester than that speech usually

is; then he added, in an overflow of hospitality:

‘Can’t you dine with us this evening? We shall be quite alone—my daughter and I—so you will not be breaking far through your hermit rule of life.’

Fairfax was silent for a moment or two.

‘Do you think I am a hermit?’ he said, with a slight laugh.

‘You have certainly produced that impression by your determination not to be troubled with your neighbours. Of course, as you are only making a flying visit, it is natural that you should shirk calls.’

‘Exactly. It did not seem worth while to begin acquaintances which I could not keep up,’ said Mr. Fairfax, in an embarrassed tone.

‘But as you have made a beginning

with me, won't you give me your company this evening?'

‘Thank you. I shall be—very glad.’

‘Papa,’ cried Bee, with lively indignation, when her father sought her to announce the coming guest, ‘how could you ask him?’

‘Why should I not ask him?’

‘Because there is no dinner. Why didn't you give me proper notice, and I could have had a respectable meal to set before him? Really, papa, you might have known better!’

‘My dear child, I suppose there will be enough to eat!’

‘It isn't the quantity—it's the quality which I am thinking of. There is cold beef,’ said Bee, clasping her hands with a tragic expression, ‘and no fish!’

‘Well, well, never mind!’ said Mr. Clare

hastily. Of all things in the world he hated domestic details. 'Mr. Fairfax knows that he was invited at the last minute.'

'Of course,' said Bee, recovering herself and blushing at her own thoughtlessness in speaking of the housekeeping to her father. 'We shall manage very well, papa.'

She went off at once to the cook to order some changes in the bill of fare. Bee rather piqued herself (and with very good reason) on her housekeeping, and it was mortifying to have a stranger brought in on her with no warning; but the cook rose to the occasion, and cheerfully undertook to do what could be done on such short notice.

Mr. Fairfax was shown into the drawing-room just before seven, and was received by

a young lady, who advanced a few steps to meet him, and held out her hand.

‘My father has not come down yet,’ she said. ‘He was kept by somebody from the village. How do you do?’

She spoke with an unaffected smile which was very winning; and her manner was pretty with its mingling of straightforward frankness and gentle graciousness. The grave-faced man whom she greeted was as thorough a contrast to her in her bright youthfulness as could be imagined, and some such thought crossed his mind as he took her hand. It was—how long?—since he had touched an English lady’s hand, and heard a refined woman’s voice address him.

Miss Clare sat down, and tried to entertain her visitor. She had time to make a few remarks before the Vicar appeared.

Each was answered with a certain hesitation and absence of manner which displeased the young lady. Mr. Fairfax did not seem at his ease; and Bee, in her own mind, set him down as awkward.

‘I suppose he has travelled so much in out-of-the-way places that he has forgotten how to talk in an English drawing-room,’ she said to herself at first; then, after her father appeared and they went to dinner, she changed her mind.

‘No; he is not awkward and stiff with papa: he has plenty to say to him,’ she thought, as the gentlemen conversed on the topic which had engaged them that afternoon. ‘Perhaps he is one of those charming men who think it isn’t worth while to talk to girls. We bore them by our frivolous discourse.’

Bee held herself very straight as this

thought occurred to her, and assumed as much dignity of deportment as she possibly could. She thought it very bad manners in Mr. Fairfax to pay her so little attention, and treat her as if she were a little schoolgirl — she who was treated by her father as a companion and almost equal.

Bee liked to have her share of talk — indeed, she was not a little of a chatterbox on occasion; and to be set aside and reduced to the passive part of a listener, as if she could not make a rational contribution to the conversation, was little short of insulting.

She was not much better pleased when Mr. Fairfax at last turned to her with a halting apology for talk which could not interest her very much.

‘Oh yes, I am interested,’ she replied.
‘I am delighted to think that something is

going to be done for our poor. But I am afraid that you will find it much harder work than you expect to persuade them to emigrate.'

Mr. Fairfax looked somewhat surprised at this frank statement.

'But when they know the advantages, surely they will be glad to go.'

'Ah, but that is the difficulty, to persuade them of the advantages. They dread the idea of leaving home. They haven't imagination enough, poor things, to picture a place where they could prosper; and they have imagination enough to think of Australia or Canada as a country full of dangerous wild beasts, and inhabited by people who don't speak English. Oh, I assure you,' cried Bee, as her two listeners laughed, 'I am not exaggerating in the least!'

‘Come, Beatrice, admit that you are exaggerating a little for the sake of effect,’ said her father.

‘No, papa; I am not. You remember old Mrs. Groves? She was a very respectable old woman—quite above the class you wish to help, Mr. Fairfax—and she was persuaded to go out to Australia with a married son of hers. When I went to bid her good-bye, she told me that she had no doubt she would soon be able to learn the Australian language, and then it would be comfortable for her.’

‘I must remember that,’ said Mr. Fairfax, ‘and assure these possible emigrants that they will not have to learn a foreign tongue.’

‘It would be a very good thing if some of them could be persuaded to move,’ said Bee. ‘They will never do any good here. I hope you will be successful.’

‘Thank you,’ he answered gravely.

Then he was silent, and after a pause, Miss Clare started a fresh subject.

‘How do you like the Manor House?’

‘Not at all,’ he replied briefly.

‘It must be depressing to live in it, I should think. It always looks so gloomy.’

‘It has a very gloomy look.’

‘It must be the oddest change to be dropped into an old lonely house in a quiet country place, after you have had an exciting life—seeing the world.’

It struck Bee that Mr. Fairfax changed colour for a moment.

‘I do not know that I have had a very exciting life,’ he said in a constrained tone, keeping his eyes on his plate.

‘We understand in Cheynehurst that you must have had all sorts of strange experiences and adventures in your wanderings.’

‘I have seen a good many places,’ he said, with a more marked constraint of manner.

‘No wonder you are not inclined to settle in Cheynehurst.’

‘Where are you going next?’ said Mr. Clare.

‘I don’t exactly know. I haven’t made up my mind what I shall do.’

‘How delightful!’ said Bee.

‘I beg your pardon?’ he said, looking at her as if with an effort.

‘I mean it must be pleasant not to be bound to do anything in particular. The feeling of freedom must be pleasant. Papa, wouldn’t it be nice just for three months to be able to choose what you would do with yourself?’

‘I am too old to care for that sort of freedom,’ said Mr. Clare. ‘I prefer the routine

which saves me the trouble of choice, and so will you when you are wiser.'

After dinner the gentlemen came into the drawing-room, deep in parish talk again. They had got to statistics by this time, and Mr. Clare produced certain papers which he laid before his guest, and asked Bee to get him some books from the study.

'You always know where my books are,' he said, with the contented helplessness which is peculiar to some men.

Bee went for the books, a little surprised and much disgusted that Mr. Fairfax paid no attention to her exit, and did not open the door for her. 'He looks as if he ought to have better manners,' she reflected. It was rather disappointing to find such an ignorance of the forms of courtesy in a man who had such a refined face and the accent of a gentleman.

When she returned, clasping some volumes which it took both her arms to hold, he did awake to a sense of the proprieties. He came quickly towards her, and took the books from her.

‘Miss Clare, I am ashamed that you should be put to so much trouble for me,’ he said, reddening.

‘They are rather heavy for you, my dear,’ said her father. ‘I forgot that they are so unwieldy. However, now you can see, Mr. Fairfax,’ etc., etc.

Presently Mr. Clare asked for some music. He was very proud of Bee’s singing. It was the one thing that she had learned thoroughly and scientifically. Her other studies had been carried on in a desultory way, at the mercy of many interruptions. She had had a governess in her childhood, and her father had given her uncertain

lessons in Latin ; then she had been sent to Queen's College, but had been called away after a year by her mother's serious illness. Since her mother's death, she had had the responsibilities of the feminine head of the household on her shoulders, and found it impossible to secure regular hours for study. She taught the two younger boys, looked after their health and their manners ; she had to keep the house, to receive and make calls, and to do some parish work. But Mr. Clare had insisted on her cultivating her voice ; and for some years she had gone up to London once a week for lessons, and by rigid economy of time had managed to practise about half as much as her master entreated.

Her voice was not strong ; but it was sweet, clear, and pure in tone, and there was something in its quality which went to

one's heart, a sadness which was the more moving because it was such a contrast to her careless gaiety.

She sang first an English ballad, then she struck a few chords, and gave them Schubert's 'Ueber allen Gipfeln.' The sad, wistful words, the beautiful melody, were given with fullest effect by her low, pathetic voice.

It rather spoilt it that she rose at the end of the song, and said lightly:

'I am sorry I am hoarse to-night, papa. I can't sing any more.'

'Thank you, my dear,' said Mr. Clare. 'Yes; you must not try another; you are a little hoarse.'

'Thank you,' said Fairfax, rising to offer her a chair by the fire.

He spoke in a formal, expressionless way, as if the singing had been a bore to him,

Bee thought. There was no complimenting her, no expression of enjoyment or admiration. Never before had her songs been taken so coldly, and Miss Clare was a little amused at this frank silence. It was refreshing to meet a man who sincerely showed his real sentiments, and had none of the small coin of civility. 'If he comes again,' she thought, 'I will warn papa beforehand not to ask me to sing. If he doesn't care for music, he shall not be forced to hear it.'

All this passed through her mind with a flash between his cold 'Thank you,' and her acknowledgment as she took the chair. She glanced up at him as she spoke, and stopped short in the middle of her sentence, for, to her utter amazement, she saw a moved look on his face, and there were—positively—tears in his eyes.

She had never received such a tribute to her power before. She hastily finished her sentence, and looked down into the fire with a thrill of excitement—a vague perception that somehow she had touched a chord of memory or feeling which vibrated painfully. She felt a curious sympathy with the emotion, whatever it was, which she had aroused, and a ridiculous impulse to say or do something to show her sympathy instead of averting her eyes in well-bred unconsciousness.

Her fluent tongue was silenced, her self-possession was overthrown. It was only for a moment or two that the disturbance lasted, and then she was ready to shrug her shoulders scornfully over her own sentimental folly; and, while she wondered at it, explain it calmly as an effect of the songs she had been singing. Music and

poetry had a great power over one's fancies sometimes.

'Do you sing, Mr. Fairfax?' she asked.

'No, not at all.'

'Nor play?'

'No.'

'I think it is a pity that men are not taught music more,' said Bee. 'I mean all my brothers to learn, so that they may have something to do in the evening at home.'

'You have brothers?' said Mr. Fairfax, after the slightest pause.

'I have three. Probably you have seen them at church.'

'Yes, I believe I have. I have an impression that I have seen some boys with you.'

'The boys would be very indignant if they knew that they produced such an

indefinite, collective impression,' said Bee, laughing. 'Have you any brothers?'

'Neither brother nor sister,' he curtly rejoined. 'I am quite alone in the world.'

Something in his tone made Bee feel that he disliked being asked personal questions, and an unpleasant suspicion that he was snubbing her curiosity came over her. But after all, anybody might ask such a question without ill-bred inquisitiveness. However, as he was so ultra-particular and reserved, she would not put him to the necessity of giving her another hint to hold her tongue; and she began talking about the weather as an eminently safe subject.



CHAPTER III.

‘Bitter shame hath spoil’d the sweet world’s taste,
That it yields nought but shame and bitterness.’

King John.

ANTHONY FAIRFAX walked slowly from the Vicarage to the Manor House, meditatively smoking, and turning over in his mind the impressions which the evening had left. It seems absurd to say that he was profoundly excited by such a commonplace experience. Nothing duller than dining *en famille* with a country clergyman can well be imagined; the clergyman himself

would be the first to say that such a ceremony could have no interest for a young man who had seen the world.

Yet it was true that he was moved in a way which made the pleasure of seeing the world seem cheap and poor. He had had enough of that ; perhaps the knowledge that he could always have as much as he chose made it less valuable.

He had carefully abstained from one kind of enjoyment. Anything coarse or disreputable he had turned away from ; partly because his tastes were too refined for him to take pleasure in debasing himself, partly because he was determined not to sink to the level to which it had been predicted that he would fall. Most men would have been made utterly reckless by what Anthony had undergone, and, having lost character, would have hastened to fling

off the restraints which character imposes, and taken a savage delight in as much license as circumstances would permit. But he had not slipped down the inclined plane of desperation. He had felt no desire to defy the world and indemnify himself by self-indulgence and lawlessness for what he had suffered. He had rather taken a gloomy satisfaction in keeping himself blameless as far as might be ; and while he wandered restlessly about, his pleasures had been innocent enough.

He had sought distraction and occupation in travelling, and he had seen a good deal of countries which lie beyond the beat of the ordinary traveller. He had visited Asia Minor and the north of Africa ; he had gone through the more unsettled parts of the United States ; he had done Japan and cruised among the islands of Polynesia.

It had been a strange life; very full in some ways, and very empty in others. He had satisfied to the full his desire of seeing new and strange things; he had learnt a great deal; and he had enjoyed himself thoroughly at times. The movement, the stir of life, the constant stimulus to curiosity and interest, had been pleasant. The change of scene, the entire novelty of his surroundings, the spice of adventurousness, had roused him, and passed the time in a satisfactory way.

But now and then he had felt tired of it. A listlessness had stolen over him, a failure of desire and motive which made everything appear lacking in zest. He began to ask, 'Cui bono?' What did it lead to, this aimless drifting?

When that mood came upon him, he looked at the unsatisfactory side of his life,

and a dreary realization of loneliness beset him. He was literally alone in the world. He was cut off from his past. He would not have been induced by any consideration to put himself in communication with anyone whom he had known before the prison-door shut upon him. He avoided forming any but the slightest acquaintance with his equals whom he met in the course of his wanderings.

He moved about in as deep a solitude as if he were shut up in a monk's cell, only associating with his fellows when it was necessary, never forgetting that men who waited on him would despise him if they knew the whole truth about him.

This morbid sense of disgrace and shrinking was not overcome as time passed, though he partially forgot it when he was sailing over the Pacific, or strolling through

a foreign town. He got used to it, as men get used to the pain which is the symptom of chronic disease, and he tried to dull it by mental stimulants and opiates.

He did not attempt to work upon it by physical means, though he had been sorely tempted once or twice to take opium. But he was held back from this by his proud determination not to lower himself by any act of his, and by sound common-sense which urged that the calm of the opium-eater was dearly bought by ruining his health. It was bad enough to bear these fits of depression when he was in good health; he shrank with horror from what they might be if his brain were weakened and his nervous system shattered. His one illness had given him a just conception of the value of bodily well-being.

He had begun his travels with a sick

desire for change, fancying that he should live down his bitter memories, and overcome that time altogether. As he recovered bodily strength, calmness and peace would come back to him; and he would shake off his misfortune as one shakes off a hideous dream. It was merely a preparation for an existence which he did not describe to himself, but which not only must fulfil his youthful dreams of what made life worth living, but make amends for the great wrong he had borne.

He set out, believing with the half-arrogant, half-divine faith of inexperience that things must come right, that there must be ample compensation somewhere.

He had hoped at first to clear himself, and to that end he had employed a detective to ferret out the truth, which would prove that he was innocent. But nothing had

come of this, and the enterprise had been given up. Still he would not despair. He must be cleared some day; and meanwhile he was young and rich, he had taken a new name, and could go where the gossip of Middleton could never reach him; the world was before him.

Slowly he had found out that that one episode in his life was the most important thing that had happened to him. It was not to be cast out of his thoughts as done with; it was not to be forgotten. It laid a cruel grasp upon all his being; it held him, and he could not escape.

Those twelve months were the centre of his life; all the time that came afterwards was flavoured with their bitterness, and their influence did not weaken as they became more distant. Always they were with him; however long he lived, he would

be a man who had a miserable secret which he dared not tell; he would hate to remember what had been, and would have no spirit to look forward to what might be.

His mind dwelt on this with a sense of degradation intolerable to bear. The prison disgrace would cling to him for ever; he could not forget that he had stood in the dock, worn a felon's dress, and obeyed a warder. His natural sensitiveness was acute enough, and it became acute to the point of disease about this. He had not toughness enough to bear it with equanimity. His illness on coming out, and the susceptible state in which it had left his brain, had deprived him of the power of rising above depressing influences.

The effect which the shock of finding himself disgraced and the prison life had produced on him, had been indelibly im-

pressed by the weeks after he became free. He had no touch of recklessness in him to take the life in gaol as a bit of out-of-the-way experience, and bear it lightly because he had not deserved it. He only saw the shame, and every detail of his imprisonment was hideous to him; of everything that took place on the first day, he said despairingly to himself, 'How am I to bear it daily for twelve months?'

Twelve months ! The time had dragged itself out to years; he felt worn and old before it was over. He never dared think of it or of his trial steadily now; it was only vaguely, as a time of torture, that it figured in his mind.

He grew more dejected as he found that he was not living down that time; and his wandering became listless and aimless. The free happy life he had hoped for was

impossible ; and the transitory period which was to heal him had proved a failure, and could not go on. He began to entertain a project which had crossed his mind at intervals since he inherited his money. He could not find a place among the fortunate people who knew nothing of unjust disgrace and blighted reputation ; but he might be useful to those who, like himself, had fallen among thieves, and needed a helping hand. There was misery enough in the world which he might relieve. He dreamt of devoting his energies and substance to the unfortunates to whose level he had really sunk ; perhaps that would give him interest and occupation.

He was thinking of this when he received a letter from his lawyer, which set forth that his presence was imperatively needed in England. He obeyed the summons with

alacrity. It was pleasant to have something to do which must be done ; an obligation was a godsend. The property in Cheynehurst required special attention, and he went to the Manor House. When he was there, he wished himself away. The place was gloomy, and it depressed him painfully. The business which he had to do was not very interesting to him ; a great deal of it was matter of detail, which did not exercise his mind, and which it struck him might have been settled by letter. The calls of his neighbours produced a panic in him. Four years' brooding over one idea had made him thoroughly morbid ; and, knowing that he would not be recognised socially if his history were known, he refused all advances. He would not take civilities from people who were under a mistake about him.

He realized his exclusion from society more fully here in his own house, and it deepened his dejection. He had passed some very miserable hours before his meeting with the Vicar. Mr. Clare never knew how strangely his friendly words came upon the bitter desolation of the young man.

He was very sad that afternoon: his depression was becoming so continuous and intense that he was growing afraid of it. Was he losing his control over his thoughts? Was he going to fall ill again?

It was a relief to have his attention diverted, and to hear a kindly human voice. He had accepted the invitation to dinner with a feeling that he must have some society; he had reached the limits of endurance, and his solitude must be broken through. It could do no harm. He was going away directly, and Mr. Clare was not

at all likely ever to learn that he had entertained a convicted felon at his table.

The change had done him all the good he could have hoped for, and had diverted his mind effectually. He walked home now through the cool night air, thinking of the evening he had spent to the exclusion of everything else. It was a blessed change to have his thoughts turned to anything pleasant and simple; it was like a lull in fierce attacks of pain. He was soothed and quieted; his feverish weariness was calmed for the time; his imagination was relieved from the strain it had undergone lately.

The glimpse of home life was inexpressibly beautiful to him. The picture was still before his eyes as he passed by the hop-gardens and the cherry orchards; he saw, instead of the rows of hop-poles and the

whitewashed trunks of trees, the pretty drawing-room; he breathed the scent of the flowers; he heard the voices which had spoken to him kindly. The atmosphere of peace had soothed him; the very simplicity of the scene made it more charming. He had scarcely formed a clear idea of Mr. Clare and his daughter; it was not their individuality which concerned him, but their relation to himself. He was touched and attracted by Mr. Clare's friendliness, without distinctly asking what sort of man he was; and he was more attracted by Miss Clare. She represented to him the side of life which he had not known yet—affection and home; it was not any flesh and blood girl whom he saw in her, but the ideal woman, the tender home angel, the sweet caretaker. He could not have said what she was like; he only knew that seeing her had roused

new, vague yearnings in his heart, and made him aware of possibilities which he had barely dreamt of before.

To have a home like that, full of peace, with a soft-voiced gracious presence all one's own! The indefinite imagination, for he gave no form to the sweet influence he coveted, made his pulses beat faster, and stirred him strangely. He thought of it with longing, but no hope; as poor men think how they would enjoy riches. But though it was only a dream, it took possession of him, and he indulged it. If it were true and real; if She were with him now, leaning on his arm, talking to him in her soft sweet voice, calling him by his name; believing in him, making such an atmosphere of calm for him that his grim memories would not dare to assail him! It was strange how he longed for this

imaginary being, and how real she seemed to be, while every attribute remained undefined and vague.

He reached the dilapidated old house, where neglect was making havoc, and went into the room which was his sitting-room. It was dimly lighted by a lamp which burnt badly, and there was no fire. Ah, if She were here, his home-coming would be very different! He contrasted this chilly dark room, with its air of discomfort, where no one cared whether he came or went, with the drawing-room at the Vicarage with its books and ornaments, the look of fresh daintiness which characterized everything in it, and a strong feeling of discontent came over him.

He was striking a light to comfort himself in man's fashion, when a servant-girl appeared at the door.

‘Please, sir, Mr. Dixon has come.’

Fairfax started a little. His thoughts were a long way off.

‘Tell him to come in.’

Bob entered. Four years had altered him greatly. His figure had developed into splendid proportions; he looked quicker and shrewder, and had lost his awkwardness.

‘Well, Bob, how are you?’ said Fairfax, shaking hands.

‘Quite well, thank you, sir. You don’t look very well, I’m sorry to see.’

‘I’m well enough,’ said Fairfax, throwing himself into an armchair and beginning to smoke. ‘Shut the door, Bob, and sit down; have a cigar, and tell me how your brother is.’

‘Thank you, sir, I’d rather not smoke to-night,’ said Bob.

Fairfax, who was aware with some compunction that he was bored by the necessity of talking as usual to his faithful friend, made no answer. Bob sat down, and said slowly:

‘He’s right-down bad, is Joe.’

‘I’m sorry to hear it,’ said Fairfax heartily enough.

Yet he was thinking most of that dream-presence.

‘Yes, sir, I knew you’d be sorry. It’s a regular bad job, and no mistake about it.’

‘Are they—could you do anything to help them? Did they need it?’

‘Well, sir, they’re not as badly off as some folks would be in their place. Joe—he has his club, and he gets so much a week from that. But still it isn’t as if he was working, and illness comes expensive,

and they haven't done as well since they left Middleton.'

'I hope you made them understand that they must draw on me.'

'I told them what you said, sir, and they were both obliged to you.'

'Nonsense!'

'Joe doesn't talk, but he felt it; and Lizzie fairly cried when I gave her the money you sent.'

'Is your brother still disabled?'

'He can't walk yet, and the doctor says it'll be some time before he can. He talks of months, and that's a poor look-out. It's hard on Joe, and he frets about it.'

'Poor fellow!' said Fairfax.

'The doctor says that he should get away into country air,' went on Bob; 'and I wanted to know, sir, whether I could have a bit more holiday, so that I could

find him diggings. Lizzie can't go about—she's tied to look after Joe, and the sooner he's moved the better.'

'Of course you can have as much time as you like. Look here, though—suppose your brother and his wife came here. They could live at the lodge—the old man there is going fast. You say your brother will be laid aside for months—how would it be if they had the lodge? They would have the house rent-free and—I really forget what the pay is a week. It would be better accommodation than they could get in lodgings, and your brother would rather have a house to himself, I should say.'

'It's very kind of you to think of it, sir,' said Bob heartily.

'Now, Bob, don't talk stuff. I never can do as much for your brother and sister

as they did for me. My debt to them is too great to be paid.'

'Indeed, sir, they've no such thought. You've done a vast for them.'

'Well, well, think about it, and see what they would like. I propose this, because it would make them feel less as if they were taking a favour, and I know how independent your brother is. But if you think he wouldn't like the position, and the offer would offend him, don't mention it to him.'

'It's hard to say how Joe may take a thing; he has such queer notions,' said Bob meditatively; 'but I'll put this afore him. I like the idea myself; it would make him more independent. And if you're staying a bit longer here, sir, I could see more of him.'

'I shall be off soon,' said Fairfax quickly.

‘I can’t stand this house a day longer than is necessary.’

‘I’m sorry for that, sir ; I hoped you’d take a fancy to the place and settle down.’

Fairfax made no answer. Bob saw by the look of his face that he had made an unwelcome suggestion.

‘Of course you can stay a while,’ said Fairfax, after a pause. ‘You ought to have some time with your brother.’

His tone in speaking to Bob was peculiar. It had none of the imperativeness of master to man ; it was friendly and considerate, and was almost the tone which a man might adopt towards his equal. Bob was deferential, yet with a touch of familiarity, and he eyed his master with an interest and affection almost pathetic.

‘Oh, I’ve had a good spell already !’ said Bob ; ‘and of course I would go with you—

that is, if you wanted me, sir. If you were going to a place where I should be no good to you, it would be another pair of shoes.'

Fairfax had thrown away his cigar by this time. He looked at the big man with a sudden smile.

'You're a good fellow, Bob,' he said gently. He got up, and laid his hand almost caressingly on Bob's shoulder as he passed his chair. 'The best fellow in the world.'

Bob made a little uneasy movement, and looked stolid, betraying none of the enthusiastic devotion which stirred him at this demonstration.

'Where are you thinking of going to, sir?' he asked.

'Oh, I don't know! Nowhere in particular,' said Fairfax, with a painful dreariness in his tone. 'I wish I could think of going somewhere, or doing something.'



CHAPTER IV.

IT was the custom of Bee and Helen to meet twice a week for the laudable purpose of improving their minds by studying in company. These readings were chiefly kept up by Helen's interest. Bee was not so much in earnest about them as her friend was, and did not quite like being tied down to read with a companion.

She was an eager reader herself, and had a bad habit of hurrying breathlessly through a book, 'tearing the heart out of it;' while

Helen liked to go steadily through a work from beginning to end.

The day after Fairfax dined at the Vicarage was one of their reading-days, and Helen appeared punctually at the fixed time. Bee was in the schoolroom, with the German book they were studying on the table before her, and another book, which Helen regarded disapprovingly, in her hand.

‘Have you prepared what we fixed?’ said Helen, after they had kissed each other.

‘I haven’t prepared a line,’ said Bee frankly.

Helen regarded her with mute reproach.

‘Never mind, Helen dear ; it really is not altogether my fault this time. That troublesome Eustace has had a cold, and I have

had to amuse him in the afternoons, and yesterday evening my time was taken up. Quite an event happened. Guess who dined with us.'

'Mr. Fairfax—I have heard already.'

'Have you? I'm rather sorry. I wanted to surprise you by the announcement. How did you hear?'

'I met Miss Bell this morning, and she told me. Let me see, how was it? Oh, I remember! Your Eliza told the butcher's boy, and he told Mrs. Watson, and Mrs. Watson told Miss Bell.'

'I wonder Miss Bell hasn't been here already to ask me about it.'

'Fortunately she had an engagement to lunch with the Hills at Stonehurst,' said Helen.

'That's a good thing! We shall escape a catechism this afternoon.'

‘Oh yes!’ said Helen. ‘It would be too bad if she interrupted our reading.’

‘Papa fell in with Mr. Fairfax——’

‘Bee dear, excuse me, but it is ten minutes past three.’

‘What a fidget you are, Helen!’ said Bee, with perfect good-humour.

‘If we begin talking about other things, we shall get no reading done at all,’ said Helen firmly.

‘Well, let us begin lessons. I thought even you would be rather interested about the first appearance of the recluse.’

‘I am more interested in our German at present. We can talk afterwards.’

‘I want you to have tea with me this afternoon. I shall be alone. The boys have gone for a long walk, and they will probably be back late. Now,’ opening her book, ‘let us begin work.’

They read steadily enough for an hour. Bee had the knack of throwing herself into whatever she was doing, and her attention to the woes of the Maid of Orleans was closer than Helen's. The latter, indeed, cared more for the reading as an exercise which would benefit her mind than for the pleasure of it. But if she was not moved as Bee was by the scene where the maid is given over to shame, and stands mute, forsaken apparently by God and man, she had the satisfaction of getting a piece which had puzzled her cleared up.

‘What a splendid scene!’ said Bee at the end. ‘Isn’t it tragic? How cruel that there was nobody to take her part!’

‘I wish it wasn’t so far from fact,’ observed Helen. ‘Schiller had no right to take such liberties with history.’

‘How could they all turn away from

her?’ said Bee, looking before her dreamily, as if she saw the scene. ‘Now, Helen,’ coming back to every-day life, ‘let us have tea. We’ll go into the drawing-room, as you say we are quite safe from an invasion by Miss Bell, and I will tell you about our guest last night.’

Helen allowed herself to unbend now, and showed more curiosity than she usually did about Bee’s gossip, even going so far as to put several questions. They made themselves comfortable in feminine fashion over the fire; Helen lounged in a low chair, with her feet on the fender, and Bee poured out the tea, and rattled away.

‘I can’t make him out,’ she said thoughtfully, after she had given a brief outline of the way in which the evening had been passed.

‘How do you mean?’

‘He puzzles me. He is so quiet and unapproachable.’

‘Does he give himself airs? I suppose he will think himself an important personage, like that Mr. Bernard who was too great to talk to us.’

Helen spoke with concentrated bitterness. Bee laughed.

‘Poor Mr. Bernard! He thought that lofty reserve towards us so imposing, and imagined we admired him for taking so little notice of our existence. He thoroughly enjoyed showing off in that way, and posing as a superior being—“too bright and good for country damsels’ daily food.”’

‘If Mr. Fairfax is like him, he must be detestable.’

‘But he isn’t. Not the least in the world. I fancied at first he was, and then I saw I was wrong. He hasn’t any airs,

indeed, he is *the* most unaffected man I ever saw. I don't believe he is aware he is handsome, and few handsome men produce that impression on one.'

'Do you think him handsome when you see him close?'

'Decidedly so. And that subdued, melancholy look he has sets him off to great advantage.'

'You speak as though you fancied he cultivated the expression on purpose to be interesting.'

'No, I don't think that. I believe he really feels as sad as he looks. He must have had some great trouble, and it has knocked half the life out of him. A young man ought not to be so quiet and subdued.'

'Depend upon it he knows how becoming his melancholy is, and he affects the languid

tone,' said Helen. 'Some men set up to care for nothing.'

'He affects nothing, and he is not exactly languid. He doesn't drawl, and he does not give himself the appearance of caring for nothing; on the contrary, he was very much interested in talking to papa about the poor of the village. He got really enthusiastic about some plans he has for persuading them to emigrate. That was the only subject he seemed to care for; he couldn't talk of anything else.'

'That must have been very interesting.'

'Yes, I was interested at first; but my interest was put on one side so completely that I felt it was superfluous. I don't like being overlooked,' said Bee, with whimsical offence. 'No doubt it is very wrong, but I like to be attended to; and Mr. Fairfax neglected me flagrantly. He thought me

incapable of entering into his pet subject, and he snubbed me ruthlessly when I tried to talk to him. He wouldn't talk back ; he just answered me and let the subject drop ; and now and then he made a little pause before he answered, which was indescribably exasperating. It made me feel so small.'

'How?'

'Oh, I can't describe how he produced the effect, but he did it to perfection. If ever you want to crush a person who is boring you, Helen, you have only to hesitate just a second or two before you reply. You must inevitably reduce him or her to silence by that treatment.'

'It doesn't sound very alarming treatment.'

'Wait till you have experienced it. I felt as if I was making a series of stupid

tactless remarks, and when I had put a question he made it appear an inquisitive one.'

'You don't like him, then?'

Bee paused for a moment. It was difficult to sum up the various impressions she had received yesterday evening, and put them into a definite form of words. Her tone was dubious as she replied slowly:

'Well, no, not exactly. How can I like a man who makes me feel insignificant? But though I was not charmed by his conversation, I was interested in him. He mystifies me. I should like to make him out.'

'Did he tell you where he comes from?'

'No; he told us next to nothing about himself.'

At this point the parlour-maid appeared.

‘If you please, miss, can you tell me when the master will be back?’

‘He will soon be in, I think.’

‘Mr. Fairfax wants to see him. Shall I ask him to wait, miss?’

‘Yes, you had better. Ask him to walk in here. Now, Helen,’ said Bee, in a rapid undertone, as the door closed, ‘you shall see him for yourself; that is, if he can face me alone. Probably he will prefer going back *unverrichteter Sache*.’

Bee’s anticipations were wrong. Mr. Fairfax accepted the maid’s invitation to wait, and was shown in.

It was a pretty picture that greeted his eyes as he entered. It was a cloudy day, and though it was daylight outside, the drawing-room was sufficiently dark to make the fire the principal light in the room. Its bright, flickering illumination

fell on the two girls—on Bee's wavy hair and rosy face, and on Helen's graceful head, deep shining eyes, and sweet pensive expression.

‘How do you do, Mr. Fairfax?’ said Bee, shaking hands. ‘I am sorry papa is out, but I expect him back every minute. You will not have to wait long. Mr. Fairfax—Miss Carlyon.’

A slim willowy figure rose from the other side of the hearth, and made him a bow.

‘Will you sit down near the fire? It is quite cold this afternoon.’

She pointed out a chair near Helen's that her friend might make the most of this opportunity of gratifying her curiosity about the recluse of the Manor House. But it seemed that Helen was not disposed to improve the opportunity. She barely

looked at Mr. Fairfax, and did not speak to him. Bee had to support the conversation herself, and she did so with a feeling of injury. Helen might at least help a little, instead of looking meditatively into the fire. It was her way to be silent with strangers; but she might make an exception now.

Mr. Fairfax did not help her at all; he was as dead a weight this afternoon as he had been last night. He originated nothing, and he was still chary of response.

While Bee valiantly talked on, Fairfax was regretting that he had come. He was painfully aware that he was doing himself no credit, and that the little lady who entertained him was bored by his heaviness. He felt like a clown. It was plain enough that he was disqualified for society, when he felt that he could not conduct himself like other men. He was more conscious of

his social deficiencies now than he had been yesterday ; for Mr. Clare and he had had so much to say to each other that Bee had been in the background, and the impressions of the evening were so new and vivid, that he had not thought of himself. But almost *tête-à-tête* with Miss Clare, he found himself unready and much at a disadvantage, and disagreeable conjectures as to her opinion of his manners troubled him. He was making up his mind to take his departure without waiting for Mr. Clare, when the front-door was heard to open.

‘That must be papa,’ said Miss Clare. ‘No,’ as a great tramping was heard in the hall ; ‘it is the boys.’

The heavy tramping was directed towards the drawing-room door. It was opened noisily, and the three boys marched in, then paused and hung back, seeing visitors.

‘Come in, boys,’ said Bee; ‘come and speak to Helen and Mr. Fairfax.’

Helen turned and held out her hand with a smile. They shook hands in turn, then went through the same ceremony with the stranger, eying him with less than the usual shyness of young boys. A clergyman’s family, even in the quietest country parish, are too used to notice from people outside the home circle to be bashful. Having made their salutations, they fell back upon their sister.

‘Where are we to have tea, Bee?’

‘Let us have it here,’ said Archie.

‘Do you mind, Helen?’ asked Bee.

‘Mind? I should like them to stay.’

‘Well then, yes, boys. Go and wash your hands first. Please ring the bell, one of you—ah, thank you, Eustace.’

The maid brought in more cups—larger

than those already in use—and a good supply of hot tea-cake and bread and butter ; and the boys made themselves comfortable, and very soon became the most important personages in the room, taking the talk into their own hands, and giving gracious attention to their elders. They had much to tell about their walk, and presently were informing Mr. Fairfax as to the attractions of his park, and making inquiries as to whether he intended to shoot the rabbits himself.

‘ Would you like to go out after them with me ? ’ said Fairfax to the eldest.

An ecstatic look in Archie’s blue eyes—a rather blank expression on the faces of the other two.

‘ Oh yes ! thank you, ’ cried Archie.

‘ All of you, I mean, ’ said Fairfax, with an extraordinary complacency in the eager pleasure which his invitation gave.

‘They would enjoy it very much,’ said Bee’s soft tones. ‘But won’t it give you a great deal of trouble? Perhaps if one went——’

‘No trouble at all. I should like it,’ said Fairfax, almost as eagerly as the boys. ‘It will be better fun for them if they are together. The more the merrier.’

After this the boys regarded him as an eminently sensible person, and Bee took him into favour on the general principle that a man who is kind to children must have much good in him.

‘He did it so nicely,’ she said to Helen afterwards; ‘he spoke as if he would enjoy it himself, and of course that must have been sheer good-nature. Fond as I am of the boys, I don’t suppose a grown-up man would cultivate their society for its own sake.’

But Bee was wrong in crediting Fairfax with disinterested benevolence. The society of these boys was pleasant to him for its own sake. It refreshed and soothed him. Their innocent chatter, their eager interest, were like a waft of cool air. He was quite surprised at the thoroughness with which he entered into and enjoyed their anticipations of pleasure in the shooting expedition. They were deliciously frank about it, and did not leave the subject till the day had been settled. It gave him a curiously fresh pleasure to be able to give pleasure to the lads. He had often enough relieved want and helped the unfortunate; but it was new to rouse the unchecked enjoyment of childhood. Perhaps no giving confers so much simple, unalloyed satisfaction as the giving a treat to a child. You are sure of attaining your end (unless you choose a *blasé*

child, the most hateful product of modern society, as the object of your kindness, which no wise person would do), and you have your reward at once.

The shooting expedition came off; and the boys enjoyed to their hearts' content watching Mr. Fairfax and Bob shoot the rabbits. With the unerring instinct of their years, they discovered that they might do pretty much as they pleased with master and man; and they took full advantage of this. Bob listened to their remarks with his placid smile, and was untiring in his patience with them, remaining unmoved when Alfred contrived to get into such a position that it was a miracle he escaped receiving a discharge in his sturdy person. Even this narrow escape of committing homicide by misadventure, which would have upset most men, did not ruffle Bob's

sweet temper. He only breathed a sigh of relief when he saw Alf still on his legs, and mildly suggested that the boys had better keep out of the way more carefully.

Bob, indeed, would have borne much from the young Clares, for the sake of the pleasure which their society seemed to give his master. It did his heart good to see him look bright. Bob was aware that his master had been very 'low' since they came to England, and he knew it was bad for him to shut himself up as he had been doing. He was thankful to see him roused from his own thoughts, and inclined to associate with his fellows. 'It's awfully bad for him to have nobody to speak to,' reflected Bob; 'and the longer he keeps himself to himself the worse he'll get, and the harder it'll be for him to get over his downness. As Joe says, it'll prey on

him, and set him off his head sooner or later if he keeps on remembering by-gones. It really is enough to make a man melancholy mad to go on fretting as he does.'

For the present Fairfax's unwholesome isolation was at an end. Before the boys went home that day, the date of their next visit was fixed. They were rejoiced to bestow their company on a person who had Mr. Fairfax's attractions—a park to shoot in, a big house which they could explore, and a store of traveller's tales which he related in a most interesting way. Bob also was a congenial companion, and under judicious questioning would tell them of adventures in which his master had distinguished himself by his pluck and coolness. These things to hear the boys did seriously incline, and Fairfax became a first favourite with them.

Mr. Clare, too, showed a strong liking for him, and saw so much of him that Bee declared her father would be accused of showing a preference for the society of his richest parishioner and neglecting the poorer ones.

‘It is well he isn’t going to stay long,’ she remarked, ‘for I think he would bewitch you and the boys if he did. I am almost jealous. The boys care nothing for my society now.’



CHAPTER V.

SOME ten days after the boys made their first visit to the Manor House, they returned from a walk in the afternoon, bringing Mr. Fairfax with them.

‘We met Mr. Fairfax,’ said Archie, ushering him into the drawing-room, ‘and he wanted to see papa, and to ask you something, Bee.’

‘So we brought him back,’ said Eustace, surveying his friend complacently. ‘We knew you would be in, and we thought papa would.’

‘Papa is in,’ said Bee ; ‘but unluckily he is closeted with some one in the study. Perhaps you won’t mind waiting a few minutes, Mr. Fairfax?’

‘Mr. Fairfax has something to ask you, Bee,’ said Alf.

‘To ask me?’ cried Bee, laughing. ‘Have you idle boys got him to ask for another holiday for you?’

‘It was all Mr. Fairfax,’ said Eustace.

‘Yes ; he asked us quite out of his own head,’ said Archie.

‘He wants us—he said so,’ cried Alf. ‘Now, didn’t you?’ he continued; going across to Mr. Fairfax, and laying a chubby hand on his knee.

‘It is clearly another holiday that is wanted,’ said Bee. ‘I think Mr. Fairfax much too benevolent towards you, boys, and I highly disapprove of your wasting so

much time. But if it is only Mr. Fairfax who wishes it in this case, and you do not——’

She paused and gravely regarded the boys, who grinned unabashed.

‘Oh, but we want to go awfully!’

‘What is it?’ said Bee, turning her merry eyes on Fairfax, who was listening to the chatter with a look which struck her strangely. He was smiling, but he looked more wistful than amused.

He explained that he and the boys had been laying plans for the celebration of the 5th of November on a truly magnificent scale. They proposed to have an enormous bonfire and a lavish display of fireworks, which must be bought in London. Would she let the boys go with him to town to choose them?

‘But it will give you so much trouble!’

cried Bee. 'Take the boys to town for the day! You have no idea what a labour you are undertaking. They will be dreadfully in your way.'

'I should like to have them with me,' he said simply.

Murmurs from the boys that they would be anything but a trouble.

'If that is your only objection, Miss Clare——' said Fairfax.

'It is a very strong one, though,' said Bee, knitting her brows. 'You see I know what a charge these three are; I have taken them to London myself, and I am ashamed that you should be worried with them.'

'It will be a pleasure. I shall like it much better than being alone. And they must get the fireworks themselves; it will be half the fun for them.'

‘Oh, yes!’ from the chorus.

‘You will let us go, Bee? there’s a darling!’ said Eustace coaxingly.

‘You will let us, won’t you, Beauty?’ teased Alf, using his baby name for his sister.

‘Oh, you boys! I suppose I must say yes. I am sorry for Mr. Fairfax.’

‘I am very much obliged to you,’ said that gentleman. ‘I should have been quite disappointed if you had refused permission.’

The boys, having gained their point, disappeared, and Bee was left alone with her visitor. She still found it hard work to entertain him. He had not shaken off the peculiar restraint which had marked his manner to her from the first; and occasionally he seemed unaware of her presence, and sat silent when he ought to have talked to her.

‘It is very kind of you to give them so much pleasure,’ she said when the door shut upon the boys. ‘It is really the noblest deed of self-sacrifice that I ever heard of, for you to undertake to personally conduct such a party.’

‘Oh, it passes the time for me!’

‘You will stay, then, till the 5th of November?’

‘Yes,’ he answered, in the brief fashion in which he replied to questions.

‘That will be a fortnight longer,’ said Bee thoughtfully. ‘Do you really dislike making acquaintance with strangers, Mr. Fairfax?’

He made a rather longer pause than usual before answering that question.

‘I am afraid I do—rather. I was very glad to make acquaintance with you all; but——’

‘That is the exception to your rule,’ she ended, smiling. ‘I asked because I was wondering if you would mind meeting a few people here, as you are staying longer than you intended; but of course if it would bore you to do so——’

‘Thank you; you are very kind,’ he said, in a non-committal tone, which was so little of an answer to her remark that she was goaded into speaking further.

‘I won’t be silenced as if I was an inquisitive little girl,’ she thought.

‘Oh no, not kind at all. I only thought if you would dine here with some of our friends it would please them to meet you. You have managed to rouse a good deal of curiosity, you see.’

‘Have I? Curiosity about what?’

‘As to why you don’t long for the society of your neighbours. The village

inclines to the belief that you are a dynamite conspirator.'

Mr. Fairfax laughed—not very naturally or merrily.

'The village pays me more attention than I deserve.'

'The village has an abundance of attention always for gossip,' said Bee; 'and of course you, being a stranger, are interesting.'

'I am a dynamite conspirator, then.'

'You are a member of one of those dreadful secret societies; and you are making dynamite at the Manor House, which is to be used in blowing up Cheyne-hurst first, and then London. By-the-bye,' said Bee, laughing, 'I dare not let the boys go with you to buy fireworks. The gossips will look upon that as confirmation of their wildest theories. I did not think of that before.'

‘And you think that if they meet me at dinner, these good people will feel some confidence in me?’

‘They will feel satisfied that there is no ground for their fancies. But of course if you would dislike it, I won’t make you go through the form of refusing an invitation.’

‘Indeed, Miss Clare, I hope I should not be so rude. If you are kind enough to ask me, I can only accept gratefully.’

‘I am glad,’ she said frankly. ‘Your presence will make our dinner-party a great success.’

‘You are joking.’

‘No, not at all. Have you not been all over the world, while we have vegetated all our lives in this corner? You will be quite a lion for me; a stranger is always a precious addition to a party here, even

an ordinary stranger who has not seen savages at home, as the boys say you have.'

'Must I talk of what I have seen?'

'Oh, if you would, it will be so good of you! To hear something fresh at a dinner-party—why, it will be an unprecedented event. We have the same things over and over again, till I know the list by heart; I don't wonder you shrink with horror from settling down here, and preferring.'

'Roving is pleasant enough, but it has disadvantages. The part of the rolling-stone is not very dignified or comfortable.'

'No; I can imagine that one grows tired of it. Are you thinking of settling down to gather moss here?'

He did not answer at once; and Bee,

feeling rebuked for her curiosity, made a remark about something else before he opened his lips.

She flushed as she spoke, and her tone was slightly ruffled. Fairfax noticed these signs of mood, and was faintly curious as to what they meant. Was she vexed with him? He was so little accustomed to regard other people's moods—partly from his solitary life, partly through the way in which he was preoccupied by his own feelings—that this was quite a startling fancy; and it was by a rather elaborate process of thought that he arrived at the conclusion that he had offended her. Looking at it from her probable point of view, he saw that he had been ill-mannered in making no reply, and blushed for himself.

‘I have thought sometimes that I couldn’t

find a pleasanter place to settle in,' he said, answering her question; 'but I haven't got further than that.'

'I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be inquisitive,' said Beatrice, drawing her head up, while her colour deepened a little.

He was right. He had offended her. Somehow he did not feel as remorseful as he ought to have done. He rather liked to see her angry.

'I could not possibly think you so,' he said. 'On the contrary, it is pleasant to have any of you show the faintest interest in my doings. After wandering about as I have done, the kindness that I have received here is more valuable than I can well tell you.'

He forgot just then that hitherto he had disliked questions about himself, and had

shrunk from them. The habit of reserve had grown upon him with every day in which he felt that he had a secret to guard and must live apart ; but it seemed possible to break through it now.

Bee was a little surprised at his warm tone. It was not what she expected from Mr. Fairfax.

‘ We have done very little to make your stay here any pleasanter, I am afraid,’ she said. ‘ There is so little to amuse people here.’

‘ You have made me enjoy it very much,’ he replied.

Mr. Clare entered, and on hearing that Mr. Fairfax intended to prolong his stay, and had consented to be introduced to his neighbours, he expressed hearty satisfaction.

‘ I am glad you are not rushing off in

such a hurry,' he said. 'Perhaps you will be persuaded to stay the winter now. I wish you were going to live here. It would be a good thing for the neighbourhood if you took your proper place in it.'

'Papa is thinking specially of a good thing for himself,' said Bee demurely. 'He would like to have you as his churchwarden, Mr. Fairfax; that is what he means by taking your proper place here.'

Mr. Clare laughed. Fairfax looked at Bee, with a brighter smile on his face than she had seen yet.

He was much less constrained in his manner for the rest of his call; he talked more, and, as Bee put it afterwards to Helen, he seemed quite humanized and friendly. He was a little surprised himself at the warmth of feeling which he was

conscious of towards these new friends. The conversation had led him to a full recognition of the change their genial kindness had made in his life.

He was turning aside from the course he had marked out for himself, because they wished it. He was prolonging his stay solely, in the first instance, to give the boys pleasure; and now he was drawn a step further, and, at the sister's suggestion, he broke his resolution to avoid society.

It did not matter very much. He had already partially given up his seclusion—this further step would have no consequences; it would be wiser, as he was connected with the place, not to affect a singularity which set people's tongues wagging and roused their curiosity; and, lastly and chiefly, Miss Clare wished it.

She made up the party for him; it would

be too ill-mannered to refuse her kindness; and she had said she was glad when he accepted. And for a smile of hers, he was quite ready to exhibit himself to gratify the curiosity of his neighbours, or to do anything else which she might please to ask.

What he would have shrunk from a few weeks ago, seemed easy and simple when she proposed it.

In the course of the talk, the Vicar asked if Mr. Fairfax had thought of anyone to take the lodge after old Humphrey, who had died a day or two before. Mr. Fairfax had. He intended to give the place to a brother of his man-servant, who had been disabled by an accident, and was laid aside for an uncertain time. He seemed very anxious that the lodge should be made comfortable for its new inmates, and with a little hesitation and many apologies for putting her to

any trouble, he asked Bee if she would look at the house, and tell him what furniture was needed for it.

‘It is a rather cool request; but a lady understands these things so much better than a man,’ he said.

‘I will do it with pleasure,’ said Bee. ‘It will give me little enough trouble. It is only fair, too, that I should make some return for the work you save me with the boys. When you have them in London, I will go over the lodge and see what is wanted.’

‘Thank you. I wish it to be as comfortable as possible, you understand, Miss Clare.’

‘Do you give me *carte blanche*?’

‘Certainly. Pray tell me of any arrangement which would make the place pleasanter for an invalid.’

‘These people are lucky to get such a benevolent employer,’ said Mr. Clare, smiling.

‘It is not benevolent at all,’ said Fairfax slowly. ‘The man is ill, and—I know him very well.’

‘Of course you will do more for him as his brother has been so long with you,’ said Bee. ‘According to the boys, your man is quite devoted to you.’

‘I believe he is.’

‘He must be more like your friend than your servant.’

‘Yes.’

He had fallen back into his monosyllabic fashion of talking, and his thoughts apparently were at a distance. His unwonted animation had disappeared. Bee felt rather sorry, but she made no attempt at reviving

it; and Mr. Clare filled up the break that was imminent in the talk by some general remarks as to the rarity of such attachment between master and man.



CHAPTER VI.

NEXT day Bee was writing her invitations for the dinner-party, when Helen appeared.

‘I hope you are not engaged for the 2nd of November?’ said Bee.

‘Not that I know of. Engagements are not so plentiful here. Why?’

‘I want your aunt and you to dine with us then to meet Mr. Fairfax. I am thinking of putting that form on each note; it will bring acceptances from everybody.’

‘Is he really coming out of his shell?’

‘For positively one appearance only.’

‘Whom are you asking to meet him?’

‘There isn’t much choice. Look at my notes.’

‘I will fold them up for you,’ said Helen, as Bee pushed the sheets towards her. Her face clouded as she looked at one.

‘Can’t you avoid asking him?’ she said.

‘Mr. Martin?’ said Bee, glancing at the note.

‘Yes. Are you obliged to have him?’

‘Why not?’

‘He is so tiresome.’

‘Why do you call him so?’

Helen coloured.

‘He is stupid, and I don’t like him. Of course, though, it is too cool for me to ask you not to invite him.’

‘He is such an ornament to a room, Helen dear.’

‘That’s a matter of opinion,’ said Helen, folding the sheet.

‘Only one opinion, he would think. He hasn’t a doubt on the subject. But you haven’t explained the reason of your aversion to him. Has he shown himself capable of admiring you as well as himself?’

Bee spoke with a laugh in her eyes, and a touch of surprise in her tone. Helen coloured more deeply, and drew her head up with a haughtiness which her long slender neck made very becoming.

‘He has been good enough to pay me some compliments lately; and he has even called a few times at our house.’

‘Well, it could scarcely have been to talk to your aunt,’ said Bee. ‘It must have been to awake your admiration. Poor Helen! But I cannot very well avoid asking him and his mother to dinner this

time. I am really sorry; it is too annoying. Fancy his taking it into his head to pay attention to *you*!

From Bee's tone it might have been supposed that Helen's attractions were very few.

'Isn't it horrid?' said Helen simply.

'It can't be your fancy,' said Bee thoughtfully. 'His attentions would have to be pointed before you noticed them.'

'Oh, I am quite sure of it,' said Helen. 'The worst part is that my aunt sees it, and she is very glad, and does all she can to encourage him. She thinks it a good thing for me—a very suitable match.'

'Why, he isn't good enough to tie your shoe-string,' said Bee bluntly.

'But you see he is very well off in his way,' said Helen drily. 'He owns the land he farms, and he has a good house.'

‘He is well off, but you would be miserable with him. Your aunt must see that he isn’t good enough for you.’

‘My aunt takes a different view. She thinks of the material advantages. Such trifles as suitability and liking are of little consequence. To get a husband is the great thing—it matters less what kind of one you get. She talks as if that was what she thought. She seems to consider it a triumph for me to have won Mr. Martin’s gracious favour; she respects me twice as much herself because of it.’

Helen laughed—an angry, jarring laugh.

‘Fancy one’s value being heightened by *his* good opinion!’

‘Don’t worry yourself about it, dear. After all, you can easily put a stop to it. You can discourage him.’

‘It is very uphill work to discourage

such a man. And my aunt 'will make a fuss; that is so tiresome. It is well to be you, Bee. You have nobody to interfere with you. Mr. Clare will never wish to get you married.'

'Oh, I shall not marry,' said Bee, in a matter-of-course way. 'I have something else to do. I could not leave papa and the boys.'

'Ah, you are lucky. My aunt is so anxious to get me married that I hate the very idea of it. She thinks of every man that comes near me as a possible admirer. It is disgusting.'

Bee made a soothing answer, and led the talk, as soon as she could, to another subject. This was an old grievance of Helen's. Her aunt's anxiety to get her married, and her machinations to bring that desirable consummation about, were

a real trouble to the girl, who was proud, shy, and fastidious. Mrs. Carlyon had not a wide field for her tactics, but she was unwearying in making the most of it; and, quiet as Cheynehurst was, Helen's beauty had already brought her some few admirers, any one of whom her aunt held it to be her duty to encourage. But Helen turned a cold shoulder on the young men of the neighbourhood. Neither small proprietor nor curate pleased her. If Mrs. Carlyon had not stood by, eager to mark the symptoms of dawning admiration, and ready to encourage them by every manœuvre which a devoted relation can employ for a girl's good, Helen might have taken a more romantic view of men's attention. As it was, what she had received so far had been more of a trouble than a pleasure to her.

All the invitations to that dinner were accepted, and Bee went about her preparations with even more than her usual energy. But she found time to comply with Mr. Fairfax's request, and she paid more than one visit to the lodge. She was interested by his anxiety to make these humble friends of his comfortable; she was touched to see him take so much thought about it, and enter into the details as he did; and she helped him to the best of her power. She was a little amused at the way in which he received her advice. He followed it with implicit deference; she had only to suggest a thing to have it done immediately. She was amused, and of course pleased.

They became much more friendly over their consultations. He was decidedly improved; his stiffness wore off, and his

reserve became less marked. Bee supposed that the change in him was merely that contact with society had rubbed off the rust which had grown over his manners during a solitary life. His manners were very good; it was impossible to call him awkward now; and if he was still grave and silent, that was certainly more becoming to him than a flow of light talk would have been.

She went to the lodge the very afternoon on which the Dixons were expected to make a final inspection, and see that the woman who had been employed to make ready had everything in proper order. When she came down from a visit to the upper rooms, she found Fairfax in the little parlour.

‘I came in to speak to Mrs. Excell,’ he said.

‘I have just been over the house,’ she said, ‘and I think it looks very nice.’

‘It is very good of you to take so much trouble.’

‘If they are not comfortable here it will be their own fault. You have done all that can be done.’

She had some chrysanthemums and ferns in her hand, and she began arranging them in a glass.

‘I thought some flowers would brighten the room and make it more home-like,’ she said, as she put them in.

Fairfax was standing beside the fire. He watched her as she stood bending over the table—watched intently the quick movements of her slender fingers, the outline of her profile, and the crisp little waves of hair which just showed under the brim of her hat.

‘There,’ she said, giving a last light touch to a fern-spray, and setting the glass in the middle of the table, ‘that is an improvement.’

She looked up at him as she spoke, and met his gaze. There was an expression in it which she had not seen before, and which made her feel conscious for a moment. She swept up a few leaves from the table, and threw them into the fire.

‘I must go,’ she said.

‘I don’t know how to thank you for your kindness,’ said Fairfax earnestly.

‘Oh, I have done nothing. It is a very small return for your goodness to the boys. I owe you several good turns for the pleasure you have given them.’

She went out of the lodge, and Fairfax followed and opened the gate for her. She was turning to say good-bye, when he said:

‘May I walk back with you?’

‘If you are going into the village. But I don’t need an escort at this time of day.’

It was late in the afternoon. The sun was near the horizon, and its level beams cast long shadows on the park, and here and there brought out a bit of rich colour on the trees. The west was bright, but cold with the golden-green which one sees at that time of year. Fairfax accepted her permission in silence, and they walked on together. But Bee was not fond of silence. Her companion’s meditations—whatever they were about—were speedily broken in upon. She began talking about the boys’ visit to London, which had taken place a day or two before.

‘They enjoyed it so much! It was an unusual treat for them,’ she said cordially.

‘It was more pleasure to me to take them than it was to them to buy the fireworks. I quite enjoyed seeing their serious interest in the business.’

‘You spoil them. It is demoralizing for them to have so much indulgence as you give them. I don’t know what they will do when you go away.’

He was silent in his way, which Bee was getting used to now, and learning to make charitable excuses for. It was not strange that a person who had lived so long out of society should be absent at times.

‘They were talking about it this morning,’ she went on. ‘I was unfeeling enough to start the subject, and it was quite amusing to see how their faces fell when I said, “What shall you do when Mr. Fairfax has gone?” They were as melancholy as owls at once, and the only consolation they could

find was that you had not gone yet. They are sure of you till the 5th, and they go on the principle of letting the morrow take care for itself. They wonder how you can find anything so entertaining in any place as shooting rabbits in their company.'

'I don't expect to do so,' he said, rather listlessly.

She looked at him, lifting her eyebrows slightly with an incredulous expression.

'You must not let your partiality for the boys lead you into flattery, Mr. Fairfax,' she said, with her gay laugh. 'You take a very exaggerated view of the charms of their society.'

'I am not exaggerating. As I told you the other day, wandering about strikes me occasionally as dull work.'

'Then why——' began Bee, and stopped short.

He gave her a strange look—a look which she did not fully understand, and which moved her curiously; there was so much settled sadness in it. It was the look of a person who is accustomed to gloom, but not resigned to it; and to her fancy there was a shade of desperate, unhoping appeal in his eyes. She looked quickly away, and the colour deepened in her cheeks.

‘Why don’t I give it up? I have got into the habit, and I can’t break myself of it,’ he said, in an apathetic tone.

They were silent for a moment or two. She walked a little faster for a few yards; but her escort did not take the hint. He persisted in their former pace, and she fell back into it; then they slackened speed decidedly.

‘That is just what everybody would say,’

observed Fairfax abruptly. 'Why should a man be so imbecile as to drift on doing what he is growing tired of, when it neither profits him nor anyone else?'

Bee kept her eyes down, and said in a matter-of-fact way :

'But perhaps living at home would tire you more.'

He drew an impatient sigh. That phrase, 'at home,' affected him strangely. Coming from her lips it had a bitter sweetness.

'You fancy that you would like being here because the quiet is a change; but you would soon find it more than you cared for, and you would pine for something wider. I suppose that is really the reason why you drift. It is pleasanter on the whole than tying yourself down.'

'Perhaps that is it.'

'Of course. If you really preferred a

humdrum life, you would take to it. You can do as you please, not being the Flying Dutchman or the Wandering Jew.'

She talked as gaily as usual till they reached the Vicarage, keeping at a safe distance from his wishes and doings.

'Will you come in on the chance of finding papa?' she said, as she stopped at the garden gate.

'Thank you, no; not to-day. I have some letters to write.'

'We shall see you to-morrow?'

He looked an inquiry.

'Mr. Fairfax,' in a tone of mock indignation, 'it isn't possible that you have forgotten your promise to dine with us? I sent you a note, and you answered it. You are coming, aren't you?'

'Oh yes, of course! I forgot for the moment,' he said, absently.

Bee made a gesture of despair.

‘You won’t forget to-morrow?’ she said.

‘It will be heart-rending if you do.’

‘No; I certainly shall remember. It was stupid of me not to do so just now; but I was thinking of something else when you spoke.’

‘Good-afternoon,’ she said, giving him her hand.

She ran indoors, not in quite such a sunny humour as usual. She felt a little disturbed, and her serenity was vaguely ruffled. She was not pleased with the part she had played in the conversation; it vexed her to remember that she had led Mr. Fairfax to speak about himself. He would be annoyed afterwards at having shown any feeling. It vexed her more to remember how his looks and words had moved her.

Then she gave herself an impatient, mental shake, and forbade herself to think about the walk any longer. She had chattered a little too fast, and that was mortifying; but she was paying far more attention to the matter than it deserved, and her fancy must not be allowed to run away with her.

‘Why should I notice or care how he looks at me? Why should I feel sorry for him? He has everything he wants; it is absurd, after all, to pity him. He cannot really be unhappy.’

Fairfax walked back by the way he had come, thinking of her.

He went into the lodge. It was close to the time when the Dixons were expected, and he had intended to be there to give them a word of welcome. The little parlour struck him as peculiarly pleasant and home-

like. He forgot that he had any proprietorship in it ; he regarded it merely as Beatrice Clare's work, and he admired it.

There was one thing which he grudged the Dixons, and that was the glass of flowers. He would have liked to carry it off for himself. He took one chrysanthemum out—a white one—and put it in his button-hole with a smile.

‘ That will not be missed, and she will not know.’

He stayed for a few minutes. The room reminded him of her. She had stood there ; she had moved that chair ; she had put that table-cover straight. He liked to remember it ; and presently he went out, and struck across the park. He wanted to indulge in this reverie, and let his thoughts drift on this new current. It would be a trouble to rouse himself to speak to anyone ; and

all at once he shrank from seeing the Dixons, and felt that he would rather put it off.

He strolled about for some time in the deepening October twilight. The old house looked comfortless and deserted when at last he approached it. The front was dark, and only a red gleam of firelight shone in one room at the side. But Fairfax looked at the grey building with a more cheerful feeling than it had ever inspired in him before.

‘Why not?’ he said to himself. ‘Why not?’

Why should he not defy the past, and act as if it had not been? Why should he not stand upon his innocence, and make himself a future as other men might do? Why should he not try to win happiness, instead of tamely yielding to his evil fate

and passively submitting to all the consequences of the great injustice which had befallen him ?

It was weak, and wrong, and blameworthy to acquiesce in what was undeserved ; it was consenting, 'in some large measure,' to injustice not to fight against it. He had endured long enough ; he felt that fate owed him some compensation.

Why should he not yield to this witchery, and let it do what it would with him ? Why should he not follow as he was drawn, and put away his feeling that he had no right to think of such things ? He had a right ; he had suffered unjustly ; and he would not have all the good of life spoilt by that.

Vague delicious possibilities thrilled him ; glimpses of a might-be dazzled him ; he felt another man. The tide of life ran quicker

with him. After his long night of gloom, was sunlight breaking upon him? Was the cell in which he had been walled up from hope and brightness thrown open at last?



CHAPTER VII.

DO hope,' said Bee anxiously, 'that it will go off well. I shall be mortified if it does not.'

It was half-past six on the evening of the dinner-party, and she was standing before the fire in the dining-room, looking at the table, and critically examining the general effect. Helen had come early, and was regarding the flowers which she had helped Bee to arrange that afternoon.

'Of course it will go off well,' said

Helen, in quite an animated tone. 'Everybody will enjoy themselves because they will meet Mr. Fairfax. If you gave them a leg of mutton and brown bread, they would not mind much, when you provided such an attraction in addition.'

'Oh, I didn't mean that exactly,' said Bee. 'I was wondering whether Mr. Fairfax would find it a great bore.'

'I don't feel very confident that he will not,' replied Helen.

'You see, if he does,' said Bee, meditatively changing the position of some wine-glasses, 'I shall feel that it was a mistake to ask him.'

'Well, never mind,' said Helen. 'It doesn't matter much whether he enjoys Cheynehurst society or not, as he isn't going to stay. Bee, I think it would have been better to mix those azaleas.'

‘Which?’ asked Bee, raising dreamy eyes.

‘There are only these. What are you thinking of?’

‘Nothing. Oh, the azaleas you said. No, certainly not, Helen; they are much prettier apart. The mass of white and of red is far more effective than a mixture could be. Well, we had better go to the drawing-room.’

There they awaited the arrival of the guests. They were a contrast in almost every point as they stood together—Helen, with her tall figure and fair statuesque face; Bee, with her slight little form and animated irregular features. As if to keep up and emphasize the contrast, the beauty was arrayed in much simpler and cheaper attire than her friend. Her dress was an old black one, behind the fashion; and she had scarcely any ornaments, except some

flowers at her throat and in her hair; but her grace carried off the shabby dress, and made it a becoming garb. Bee wore a rich dark blue silk, well made, and with creamy lace round her fair neck and falling from her elbow-sleeves; she had bracelets on her wrists and pearls round her throat. Every detail of her dress had the finish and completeness which can only be attained by those who can pay for such qualities.

Helen looked at her admiringly.

‘You look so pretty to-night, Bee. That dress suits you perfectly.’

‘Do you think so?’

‘Dark blue suits you better than any other colour.’

‘Then I am glad I chose this dress,’ said Bee gravely. ‘But, Helen, white suits you best. Why didn’t you put on a white dress?’

‘Because my aunt wished me to do so.’

‘Oh, I see,’ said Bee, laughing. ‘Mr. Martin?’

‘Exactly. She was quite anxious about it.’

‘Well, why shouldn’t you oblige her?’

‘If it was only a question of obliging her, I would do it at once. But——’

‘Why not look your best in spite of Mr. Martin?’

‘He is quite vain enough to suppose I had put on my prettiest dress for his gratification,’ said Helen. ‘He believes that every girl whom he approaches feels her heart beat faster with hope that she has gained favour in his eyes. Perhaps some day I may wish to make a man admire me. But sooner than lay myself open to the suspicion of wishing to please that man, I would wear shabby dresses all my life. This dress is not at all becoming, is

it? I don't think it will be taken as a tribute to his vanity.'

'No,' said Bee, laughing rather constrainedly; 'it doesn't look as if you had been anxious to deck yourself.'

'You are standing too near the fire, Bee. It is flushing you.'

Bee moved away. 'After all, your dress is of no consequence. It doesn't make any difference; you are not dependent on fine clothes for your looks.'

'I should look better in another dress,' said Helen, regarding herself gravely in a mirror. 'And it is dress that wins half men's admiration, I believe.'

A ring was heard at the door, and in due time Mr. Martin himself was announced. He entered with a rather perturbed expression; he was consumed with self-reproach at finding himself the first to arrive; it

was countrified to be so ultra-punctual, and if there was anything which Mr. Martin dreaded, it was to seem countrified. He desired earnestly to appear a man of the world; and his struggle to do so was the more severe because his ideas of the character were vague.

He was a good-looking fellow — most people called him handsome, and he was quite sure that that adjective described him fairly. He was tall, and he carried himself with the air of a man who is conscious of being well worth looking at; he had dark eyes and hair, a sunburnt complexion, and a heavy moustache, the object of his care and pride. He might have been agreeable if he had not been vain and affected; but these qualities do not make a man acceptable to his fellows.

He greeted Miss Clare with his most

languid air—he had several manners, and he thought the lazily indifferent the most likely to produce a proper impression on a young lady.

Close upon his heels came another guest—Miss Bell, a tall woman, with a pleasant comely face—one of the greatest gossips in the parish. Mr. Martin became more gloomy at the sight of her. Everyone knew that Miss Bell was always first at any gathering. He compared his watch with the timepiece, and said to Bee:

‘I think I must be fast, Miss Clare, if your clock is right. I timed myself to arrive just at seven.’

‘Oh, you are decidedly fast,’ said Miss Bell briskly; ‘or else you must have driven much quicker than you intended. Which horse did you drive?’

‘The grey.’

‘That’s it; you have come at a good pace. That grey is a capital one to go—the fastest horse in the neighbourhood.’

‘He is a pretty good horse,’ assented Mr. Martin complacently.

Having made it appear that his unfashionably early appearance was caused by no fault of his, he felt more at his ease, and unbent graciously towards Miss Bell, who was catechizing him about his mother’s health, and the exact reason why he had dismissed a man from his service last week. Mr. Martin took this curiosity in good part; it was natural—indeed inevitable—that his affairs should rouse interest; and he was quite willing to dilate upon the misdeeds of the erring groom, the singular acuteness with which he had discovered them, and the swift retribution which had followed.

‘I wasted no words on him. I just said, “Excell, you can take a week’s wages, and be off at once.” By Jove, he was dropped on! But I wasn’t going to put up with it.’

Mr. Martin drew himself up with the air of a man who can act with dignity and promptness on occasion.

Mr. Clare had come in; the other guests were arriving, and Bee was engaged in receiving them. Mrs. Carlyon came among the rest; a big woman, with a plain face, and a manner which was spoilt by a conscious effort to be agreeable. She greeted Bee with exaggerated amiability; then she smiled her sweetest on Mr. Clare, and swept on to where Mr. Martin was exchanging remarks in an undertone with Mr. Moore, the curate.

Mr. Martin made a point of talking as

much as he could to men on festive occasions. It looked well, and gave him a comfortable sense of his advantages as a man to stand apart from the ladies, and think that they must regret his preference for more solid mental fare than their light conversation. He really preferred talking to girls; but he enjoyed the display of lofty indifference and the sweet consciousness that he was not making himself cheap. Accordingly, he was rendering Mr. Moore very unhappy, to judge from his expression, by addressing to him a few remarks on the weather and the market. Mrs. Carlyon delivered the curate, who instantly put himself at a safe distance, while the lady conversed graciously with Mr. Martin.

Fairfax was the last to arrive. He was a little late; and his tardiness caused a slight excitement, which brushed the surface

of the talk and raised a lively ripple upon it. Questions were put as to whether he had accepted the invitation; fears were expressed by some doubting souls lest the morbid distaste for society which he had shown already had broken out again, and he was not coming; speculations were indulged in by others as to what made him late. Mr. Martin charitably suggested that his watch might be slow, adding:

‘ Mine is fast, and it made me a quarter of an hour earlier than I meant to be.’

The elder men were beginning to look grave and reproachful; but they had only to wait a few minutes after the hour of dinner before Fairfax was shown in.

Bee greeted him pleasantly; but her manner in speaking to him was not quite so easy as it generally was; there was a shade almost of shyness in it. Seeing him,

she remembered her foolish fancies yesterday, and the remembrance was unwelcome.

They went in to dinner directly. Mr. Somers, the Rector of a neighbouring parish, took in Bee; Fairfax was on her other hand. She was too busy in helping soup and talking, to think of less prosaic realities; and her faint embarrassment disappeared as she attended to her duties as hostess.

She soon became aware that she might rest content that the dinner was going off well. The dishes were well cooked; the guests were eating and talking with an appearance of enjoyment; and—what was more important—Mr. Fairfax did not seem bored. He did not fall into fits of silence; on the contrary, he was quite talkative. Bee's satisfaction at this was not shared by the company. Fairfax's animation rather

disappointed them. They had imagined that he would be a forbidding personage in society, addicted to a tragic gloom as of a man who had a past. A gentleman with a cheerful smile, who ate his dinner with a good appetite, was too everyday a character.

‘He looks quite different now,’ complained one romantic young lady to Mr. Martin. ‘When I met him out of doors, he looked miserable, as if he had something on his mind.’

‘Very likely he has,’ said Mr. Martin.

‘He was quite interesting; he put me in mind of the king—who was it?—who never smiled again. Which king was it?’

‘Don’t you remember?’ said Mr. Martin. He had forgotten himself, as his knowledge of English history was but slight; but he was not going to expose his ignorance.

‘I don’t just now. Who was it? One

of the Henrys. Henry VII., of course. But Mr. Fairfax looks quite jolly to-night. He has plenty of smiles. I think he is handsomer with that sad expression.'

'Do you call him handsome?'

'Of course I do; don't you?'

'Well, he isn't bad-looking,' allowed Mr. Martin; 'but he wants go. Too quiet-looking for my taste.'

The young lady had tact enough to change the subject, and Mr. Martin was not troubled with further talk about the new-comer. But Mr. Fairfax was altogether too prominent a figure to please him. He did not enjoy seeing himself so much less important than another man. Mr. Martin found himself indulging in cynical reflections on the power which curiosity exerts, as he noted the attention paid to this stranger all because he had shut himself

up at first, and rudely declined his neighbours' advances. Everybody wished to know him, because he had made acquaintance valuable.

After dinner, Mr. Martin tried to get some talk with Helen Carlyon; but she baffled him for a while by taking up a position between two elder ladies, to whose entertainment she devoted herself with singular perversity. His turn was only secured by some exertion on his part. Once caught, Helen was too well-bred to be anything but courteous. Her gentle, chilly politeness rather perplexed him. He understood a girl making herself very agreeable to him in a warm way, showing pleasure in his talk, and trying to keep him at her side; he would have understood also the snub direct and a decided turning of the cold shoulder; he had experienced that

once or twice, when he had inadvertently come between a girl and a man with whom she was flirting ; but this considerate civility he was not so well used to, and he could not decide what it meant—whether it was caused by natural girlish shyness, or was the disguise of deeper and even more flattering feelings.

Helen was quite right in her belief that she had found favour in Mr. Martin's eyes. He was more deeply smitten with her than she supposed, and he had made up his mind to give her his hand—I do not write offer, for he never dreamt of being refused. He was of the opinion which I once heard a man of experience utter—that a man can always win any particular woman on whom he sets his fancy ; at least, he felt that the saying was true when he was the man in question.

He was very much in love with Miss Carlyon. He admired her beauty immensely ; he liked her quiet ways, and the pride of which her neighbours accused her ; his wife ought to be a proud woman ; he even admired her reputed cleverness, as another distinction. The fact that she had no money of her own, and that it would be long years before her uncle could reasonably be expected to die and leave her his savings, had at first been a drawback in Mr. Martin's eyes ; and it had been a little time before he had given up his prudent intention of marrying money ; but Helen's charm wrought upon him so strongly that it made him overlook her want of worldly goods, and having made up his mind to follow his affections, he was pleased by the romantic aspect which this gave to the affair. He could afford to listen to his

heart ; and also he wisely considered that a portionless wife would be more amenable to control than a woman of independent means ; perhaps more economical, too.

His mother had injudiciously strengthened his determination by violently objecting to his chosen bride. Her arguments and remonstrances were admirably adapted to urge him on in the way which she wished him not to take. All Mr. Martin's dignity and self-importance were roused. Listen to his mother's advice ? Not he ! Of course his mother objected. She would always object to his marriage, and dislike a daughter-in-law ; it was only natural that she should be jealous. With lofty contempt for these petty feelings, Mr. Martin went on his way, and refused to listen to the maternal entreaties. It gave him considerable gratification to assert his own independence and

freedom of action. That very afternoon he had had a scene with his mother, who was kept away from the Vicarage by a bad cold. She had implored him to think of some one else, not a stuck-up madam who would be too fine to look after the house, and would do nothing to advance his fortunes; and he approached Helen now, strung up to carry through his purpose, and full of admiration for the depth and disinterestedness of his attachment which made him disregard worldly considerations, and steeled him to endure these unpleasant family scenes.

He was not allowed to enjoy his lady's society long. Miss Clare soon came to ask him to sing, and he was constrained to obey. He played on the piano in a rather rough but effective fashion; and he was always expected to perform at any gathering in the neighbourhood. His forte was

in lively, stirring songs; but on this occasion he chose to sing a sentimental love-ditty.

‘The nearest approach to a serenade he can well make,’ whispered Bee to Helen.

Mr. Martin had his reward. He could see that Miss Carlyon’s face wore an expression of fixed gravity, and her eyes were downcast. Evidently she understood, and was affected; and he could bear with fortitude to hear Miss Clare say at the end:

‘Thank you, Mr. Martin. How pretty! Now, please will you sing something amusing?’

After his second song, Helen was called upon to play, and she went with cheerful alacrity to the piano.

‘Something noisy,’ said Bee, aside to her. ‘They talk more freely then.’

Helen nodded, and began Liszt's arrangement of the March in Tannhäuser. Very few listened. They were old-fashioned in Cheynehurst, and had not learnt to consider instrumental music as anything but an accompaniment to their own sweet voices.

During the performance, Mrs. Price—the doctor's wife—talked steadily and perseveringly to Fairfax. He had been introduced to her a little while before, and she wished to make the most of her time, and push her acquaintance with him as quickly as she could. She was a youngish woman, with fine black eyes and black hair—the sort of hair that looks coarse. Her figure would have been well-proportioned if she had not laced too tight, and her voice was harsh in quality. As only one part of her dis-

course made any impression on Fairfax, it is only necessary to record that.

‘What do you think of Miss Carlyon’s looks?’ she said, as Helen sat down.

Fairfax looked at Helen, and said that he thought her beautiful. He spoke in a cool, dispassionate tone, much as he might have said that a picture was beautiful.

‘She certainly has a beautiful figure, but she is rather too pale,’ said Mrs. Price, who was given to talk in a depreciating way of everybody. Man or woman—whichever the subject of her remarks was—she spoke of the person either with gentle, excusing tolerance, or open censure. ‘I like Miss Clare’s looks better on the whole.’

Fairfax made no reply. He did not even glance towards Miss Clare. He objected strongly to hearing remarks on her looks,

and he would have felt it impertinent to make any on his own account. What business had he to compare her with another girl?

Mrs. Price did not find this want of response as irritating as Bee did, and she pursued calmly:

‘It is a pity that Miss Carlyon gives herself such airs. It spoils her. She has too high an opinion of herself, and it isn’t becoming in her position. Have you heard the story about her father?’

‘I have only heard that he is dead.’

‘Yes, indeed; and in such a shocking way.’ Mrs. Price lowered her voice discreetly. ‘He got into some scrape—failed in a dishonourable way. It was a disgraceful affair altogether, and he committed suicide.’ The last words were whispered impressively. ‘Blew his brains out,’ said

Mrs. Price, with a smile of enjoyment at telling such a sensational fact. 'Such a sad thing, you know.'

Mr. Fairfax again made no reply. Bee, catching a glimpse of him just then, thought: 'He is trying to snub her, and she won't be snubbed. How can she go on talking while his expression says so plainly that he disapproves of her gossip!'

No disapproval could touch Mrs. Price. She 'continued to smile,' and spoke further:

'It is a terrible thing for the family, of course; and it will always stand in Helen's way. I have never mentioned it to her'—in the tone of one who speaks of a heroically kind and truly forbearing act—'I have never spoken of it before her.'

'How long ago was it?'

‘Oh! a very long time—when she was quite a little girl.’

‘She doesn’t know then, probably?’ he said quickly; ‘that is, if her friends are all as considerate as you.’

‘Ah! I am afraid that people are not always considerate,’ said Mrs. Price, graciously accepting this compliment with no perception of its irony. ‘But I believe she doesn’t know—I have heard so.’

‘Poor child!’ said Fairfax, under his breath.

He turned away from Mrs. Price, and listened to Helen’s playing, watching her meanwhile with an attention he had not given her before. The information which had just been bestowed upon him gave a new interest to the girl’s face, and a new meaning to her wistful eyes. Something of the same shadow which had darkened

his days had fallen over her life ; and if she was unconscious of its presence now, she had already felt its chill ; and her eyes would be opened to its blackness sooner or later.

He was drawn to her as he had never yet been drawn to any human being ; there was a fellowship between them. She would learn the truth about her father's end ; hear it probably in a cruelly exaggerated form. ' Poor child—poor child ! ' he said to himself, as he looked at the delicate face, with its fine clear lines ; she was not strong enough for the pain she must bear.

Helen had finished her performance and risen, but Fairfax stood still deep in thought, when the light touch of a fan on his arm roused him, and he turned to look down at Bee. Her eyes were raised with a

laughing light in them, a soft rose-colour tinted her cheeks, her lips were parted in a smile; the up-turned face was so lovely, that a sudden admiration sprang into his grave eyes. He had not seen her half so fair before. His saddened sympathetic mood vanished at the sight of her; yet he half sighed. This radiant smiling beauty, which had 'felt no age,' and looked as though it had 'known no sorrow,' was very sweet; but what had it to do with him? She belonged to the sunshine from which he was shut out.

'I am not doing my duty, I know,' he said, with an amused, deprecating glance.

'Are you tired of talking?' she said, rather dubiously. 'I don't wish to tease you and make a duty of it.'

'You are punishing me by taking my speech literally. I am not tired at all—

only I had fallen into a reverie while Miss Carlyon played.'

'I came to ask you to talk to her a little. That will be easy for you, as you know her already.'

'That is very kind and considerate of you.'

'Helen,' said Bee, when she had led him to her friend, 'will you show Mr. Fairfax those views? Perhaps he can tell us whether the foreign ones are good.'

Helen assented, and exerted herself in a grave business-like fashion to entertain Mr. Fairfax. She was less cold to him than she was to her admirer; she had caught something of the general interest in him and some of Bee's pity, and she liked his quiet, courteous manner. They grew quite friendly over the views. He treated her with even more gentle deference than

before; there was such a pathos in her position. He fancied he could read the influence of that blight which she was ignorant of in everything about her, even in her shabby dress. Her father had left her to bear poverty and to be reared by the grudging charity of relations. This was rather hard on Mrs. Carlyon, who spent as much as she could afford on her niece's dress, and was that evening mourning that the old-fashioned dress had been brought out, while a fresh handsome white one was in the wardrobe at home.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE morning before the dinner-party, Fairfax called at the lodge to bid the Dixons welcome. He went with something of an effort, of which he was privately ashamed. It was distasteful to him to see these people again; and he was weakly afraid of the power their presence might have to stir up memory of the past time they were connected with.

In the few weeks which had elapsed since his proposal that they should come, his

feeling about that time had changed greatly. The remembrance of it had passed from him in a great measure, and he thought less of it than he had ever done before. It was less important, and required less attention than the small events of every day—a walk or drive with the boys, or a visit to the Vicarage. Each day seemed to set it further off.

He shrank nervously from any disturbance of this peaceful frame of mind. But it was too shabby to entertain such a feeling towards the people to whom he owed such a heavy debt; he could not be so inhumanly ungrateful. His reluctance to have them near him was not complicated by any fear that they might betray his secret. Most people would have thought of this at first, but it did not occur to Fairfax. He felt no less safe with Joe and his wife than he did

with Bob ; it was simply the effect which seeing them again might produce on him that he dreaded.

Yet, as he went through the park that morning, he thought less of his errand than of his talk with Bee Clare yesterday afternoon. The memory of her looks and words pushed aside all former memories and made them faint and dim.

After all, his visit was much easier than he expected it to be. There was nothing painful for him personally in it ; Joe and Lizzie were both too much altered to remind him of their first acquaintance. He forgot himself in his regret at the change.

Lizzie was a pale thin woman now, with a face showing lines of anxiety and toil, and the subdued unexpectant air of one who knows trouble ; and the white-faced

invalid, helpless in the armchair by the fire, was sadly unlike the active, restless little man Fairfax had known. Only his eyes, bright and quick as ever, were the same. He talked, too, in much his old way, but his irritability was sharpened by his weakness; and now and then he made a resolute effort at controlling it, and was carefully gentle in a way that was pathetic.

‘I was going to say, Joe, that I’m sorry to see you here,’ said Fairfax; ‘but that doesn’t sound very civil. I wish, though, I could see you in any other way.’

‘And I can say that I’m sorrier to be here than you can be to see me,’ quoth Joe, with a twinkle in his eyes. ‘I can’t say as I’m a willing guest, sir.’

‘Indeed, sir,’ put in Lizzie, ‘we are both very glad to come, and very much obliged

to you. You mustn't mistake Joe; he will say queer things.'

'Oh, I understand Joe quite well,' said Fairfax.

'I'm sure I'm thankful to be in such a beautiful place.'

'I hope you find the house comfortable.'

'It's more than comfortable, sir; I can thank you enough.'

'There's nothing to thank me for. I hope the country air will bring Joe round soon.'

'He'll pick up here, sir, I'm sure. He'll soon feel stronger in this air, and with the beautiful fresh eggs and milk—won't you, Joe?'

'I hope so,' said Joe, in an unhopeful tone. 'Anyway, you've given me the best chance I could have, Mr. Fairfax. The

doctor said that if I ever was to pull round, I must go into the country.'

'Oh, Joe, he said that you would soon be all right if you were only away out of that dreadful London,' said Lizzie anxiously.

Joe looked at her with a softening of his face, and only said:

'Was that it, lass? Well, then, you may be easy about me, as we have got out of London.'

'Oh yes, of course he'll get strong here,' said Fairfax cheerily.

In the first freshness of the spring which had broken upon the 'winter of his discontent,' he could not but be hopeful for everybody.

Next day Joe was alone in the house, his wife having gone to the village to make some purchases. He was sitting by the

fire, which, bright as it was, could not thaw the chilliness caused partly by his injuries, partly by want of exercise; and he was looking moodily towards the view framed by the window. It was only a square of turf, with a distant tree or two, and a bit of blue sky. A few sheep were diligently cropping the grass, and the peaceful sunshine of a fine November day brightened everything. It was a much pleasanter outlook than the grimy houses and roofs which he had seen from his lodging in London, till he was sick of their straight lines and hideous monotony; but Joe was not thinking of this. He was pondering over the contrast between his hard lot, his helplessness and suffering, his days and nights of pain and restlessness, and this quiet world, with its blue sky and sunshine.

He heard a knock at the outer door, and he was irritated to remember that his wife was out. He could not move to admit the visitor, whoever it might be. It must be Mr. Fairfax. Joe's face brightened a little. He would like a talk with him; it would be a cheering change. Surely Mr. Fairfax would have sense enough to know that he was alone, and would walk in. But perhaps Lizzie had fastened the door. Another knock, louder and more peremptory; then the door was opened.

Joe drew a long breath of satisfaction, and said eagerly, 'Come in,' as a knock came at the room door; then he was disappointed, for not Mr. Fairfax, but a young lady, entered.

Now Joe disliked young ladies even more than he disliked young gentlemen. He had a great respect for the women of his

own class, for he had had a clever, capable mother, and his wife was shrewd and energetic. A man's estimate of women is a pretty sure measure of the capacity of his feminine belongings. If they are fools, he generalizes like Hamlet, who, being shocked by his mother's weakness, sprang to the conclusion, 'Frailty, thy name is woman !' and sets down all women as fools; if they are such as he must respect, he is respectful to the sex. But young ladies were idle and helpless, fond of dress, and no good at all in the world, according to Mr. Dixon: they toiled not, neither did they spin, and he despised them heartily.

'I beg your pardon,' said his unwelcome visitor; 'I knocked twice and nobody came, and I thought that perhaps Mrs. Dixon was busy and did not hear. I hope I haven't come at an inconvenient time.'

Joe was somewhat mollified by the pleasant face and voice, and he highly approved of her manner. It was as courteous as if he had been her equal.

‘My wife is out,’ he said. ‘She won’t be long. Will you sit down and wait for her?’

‘Thank you ; I shall be glad to do that.’

She drew a chair near the fire and sat down.

‘I am Miss Clare,’ she said. ‘My father is the clergyman here. We know Mr. Fairfax, and he told me about your illness. I called to ask how you are. I hope you bore the journey pretty well.’

‘Thank you, ma’am,’ said Joe, feeling obliged to be very polite to this friendly young lady, ‘I stood it fairly. It shook me a good bit,’ he added, with the con-

scientious attention to detail with which most men speak of their health.

‘I hope you will like Cheynehurst. The country round is rather pretty, but this is a bad time of year. If you stay till spring, you will see it at its best.’

‘I don’t know how long it will suit Mr. Fairfax to have us stay,’ said Joe grumpily.

Miss Clare’s speech reminded him that his stay there did not depend on himself; and because it galled him to know this, he spoke of it the more openly.

‘I meant that perhaps you would be well before spring, and that you might not care to stay after you recovered.’

‘I’m afraid that’ll be a long day,’ muttered Joe.

‘Oh, I hope not! You must keep up your spirits, and hope to get better soon. But you will feel dull at first, coming to

a strange place, and the fuss of moving would tire you.'

'It has upset me a bit, I dare say,' said Joe. 'But a man gets disheartened to be tied to a chair like this, and not able to stir a foot. It comes heavy on one to be a burden on other folk's hands.'

'Yes ; it must be very hard. Mr. Fairfax said you would feel it very much, as you were so active naturally.'

Joe shook his head with a half-sigh, half-groan.

'I suppose you can read,' went on Bee. 'I mean,' laughing at his offended start, 'that you are strong enough to amuse yourself in that way?'

'Yes ; I can read without tiring myself.'

She asked about the kind of reading he preferred, and she was surprised to find that he had read so much. Joe was not

unwilling to show his pretty visitor that he was a man of superior tastes and acquirements, and he discoursed at some length upon his studies.

Enter Lizzie, with a look of amazement at finding her husband engaged in amiable converse with a young lady. Bee introduced herself, and in a few minutes Lizzie was talking to her freely, and pouring out her troubles with the confidence of one who is sure of a sympathetic hearing. It was a comfort to talk to a woman who had time and patience to listen, and was not, as Lizzie's late neighbours had been, too deep in care herself to spare kindly feeling for others.

Bee heard a long account of the accident to Joe: how he had fallen off a high pair of steps as he was painting, and the steps had come down with him and upon him: how

he had been bruised and his back strained, while the shaking had upset his nerves, and made him at first as cross as a teething child.

‘Ay, you had a bad time with me then!’ said Joe, in a shamefaced way. ‘You should have sent me to a hospital.’

‘As if I would ever let you be beholden to strangers when I can do for you, Joe! He likes to say queer things, ma’am.’

Then Lizzie talked about the house and her shopping. When Bee departed, promising to lend Joe some books and newspapers, she left two people much better for her call.

‘She’s a sweet young lady,’ said Lizzie, with unwonted fervour. ‘She’s a lady every inch of her; you can see that by her pleasant way. You didn’t mind her coming, Joe?’

Lizzie was rather anxious on this point, as her husband, after he had consented to come to Cheynehurst, had grumbled freely at the prospect of living in a village, where the parson would come bothering him, and charitable ladies would probably insist on thrusting their acquaintance upon him. He had been atrociously rude to the district visitor of the street in which he lived in London; and he had driven the curate from him, declaring that he wanted neither tracts nor prayers; and Lizzie trembled lest he should offend Mr. Fairfax, and bring discredit on his patron and on himself, by acting in the same way here.

‘That’s a fool’s question, anyway,’ he said tartly. ‘Why should I mind?’

‘Why, you said that you wouldn’t have gentlefolks coming to pester you.’

‘Well, you needn’t fash yourself. Miss

Clare hasn't pestered me. She behaved to me as civilly as if I was—a curate myself, and I'm not likely to be uncivil to her. You might see yourself she's not one of the sort I hate. She didn't say a word of preaching, and she left my soul alone, and didn't set up to know better than I do.'

This was high praise from Joe, and Lizzie felt that Miss Clare had produced a very favourable impression indeed.

'I hope she'll come again,' said Lizzie.

'She'll come, sure enough. She said she would; and she isn't one to talk as she sits; she means what she says.'

When, a day or two after, Mr. Clare called on this new parishioner, the visit was not quite so successful as his daughter's had been. Joe regarded parsons with bitter contempt and aversion. He felt towards them much as a fashionable Conservative

feels towards a thorough-going Radical, except indeed that his dislike was not flavoured with fear.

His notions about them were crude and rather too sweeping. They were 'mostly fools,' and very often hypocrites, who could not possibly believe what they taught.

Mr. Clare talked pleasantly enough to him ; but Joe was quick to detect that the kindly phrases were a form, and that the call was paid as a duty. He did not make allowance for the fact that when showing kindness is a part of professional work, it becomes a matter of routine more or less, and is done sometimes in a mechanical way. When we have to say the same things a few thousand times, we use the same phrases till they are worn threadbare, and our feeling is worn as thin. Mr. Clare was sincerely desirous of showing himself

friendly to the invalid, but he could not flatter him by the fresh interest which Bee had displayed. He was thirty years older, and he did not care much for his pastoral office.

He asked a question about the church which the Dixons had attended in London. Joe answered curtly that they did not go to church.

‘Ah, I beg your pardon,’ said Mr. Clare. ‘I did not know that you were Dissenters. There are two chapels in the village.’

‘I’m not a Dissenter either, exactly,’ said Joe; ‘at least I suppose you wouldn’t call me one, though I dissent from more than they do. The fact is, I’m a Freethinker. I’d better tell you at once, sir; you’ll be wasting time over me, for I have nothing to do with your church, or any church.’

Mr. Clare raised his eyebrows a little,

but he gave no other sign of surprise. Nor did he attempt to bring Joe to a sense of the error of his ways.

‘I am sorry to hear you say so,’ was all he said.

‘It’s only fair that you should know. I’m not going to hide my opinions, and sham religion.’

‘Certainly ; it is much better to be honest. Still, I hope you don’t feel that it will be waste of time for me to come occasionally to ask after you while you are in my parish ?’

‘I only meant that any parson’s talk was thrown away on me.’

Lizzie was in the room when this took place. Her consternation was great ; and she came as near being angry with her husband as she could be while he was ill. She could have cried with mortification

that Joe should be so wrong-headed as to make a confession which must put a stop to any notice from the Clares. She was pleased with their visits: it was like a revival of her childish days when she—the daughter of a gentleman's gardener—had been noticed by the ladies at the Hall. And it was very hard to lose the kindness of that pretty Miss Clare.

When Mr. Clare rose to go, Lizzie found courage to say:

‘I hope, sir, you won't mind what my husband said, and keep Miss Clare away. She said she'd come again——’

‘I'd be sorry if the young lady stayed away because of me,’ interrupted Joe. ‘My wife was glad to see her, and so was I.’

‘Oh, of course she will come again if you wish it,’ said Mr. Clare.

‘Joe will talk in that way ever since he

got to know some of them lecturing people, and they put all sorts of things into his head,' said Lizzie; 'but he doesn't mean half.'

Few things can be more exasperating to a man than for the wife of his bosom to attribute his originality of thought to some one else. If his own wife doesn't respect his intellect blindly, who will? And to have it said that he doesn't mean his statements of his convictions is almost worse. But Joe heroically restrained any expression of anger, and only said:

'Anyway, I can promise not to talk in that way before Miss Clare.'

'Very well,' said Mr. Clare. 'I will tell her that you would like to see her, Mrs. Dixon.'

He took his departure, and Lizzie gave it as her opinion that he was as nice as his

daughter in his way; and then scolded her husband pretty freely for his want of manners to the clergyman.

‘What call had you to go and tell him that you weren’t a decent Christian?’ said Lizzie, who was more deeply convinced of the folly of Joe’s views since his accident. That had proved the impolicy towards heaven of heresy; and open confession of the heresy was as impolitic towards men.

‘I’m not going to be a hypocrite.’

‘Nobody asked you to be a hypocrite. You might just have held your tongue and said nothing. You aren’t obliged to tell all you think. But you must out with everything; just as if you were proud of them notions of yours, which will bring you no good here or hereafter. Oh, Joe, do keep yourself quiet, and don’t go setting folks against us! If you must

think such dreadful things, keep 'em to yourself.'

Joe became cross on this remonstrance, and they had a warm dispute, which ended in his falling into a fit of sulky silence for some time. After tea, Bob came in to spend an hour or two.

'How are you to-night, Joe?' he asked. 'Getting on?'

'I doubt there's precious little chance of that for me,' said Joe, who had not recovered his good-humour, and in his present temper felt some pleasure in expressing a despondent view of his condition. It would do Lizzie good to be reminded how ill he was.

'Come, you mustn't talk like that; you look a vast better already,' said Bob cheerfully. 'You'll soon be on your legs again.'

‘Ay, it’s easy to talk.’

‘Do you feel any worse to-night, Joe?’
said his wife anxiously.

‘I don’t feel any better,’ was the pathetic rejoinder.

Bob produced his pipe, and filled it. This process did not tend to soothe Joe’s ruffled feelings. He was forbidden to smoke, and the deprivation was a serious one for a person of his irritable nerves. He looked on with a deepening frown as his brother pressed the tobacco down in the bowl, then lit it, and drew long, regular whiffs with an expression of placid enjoyment.

‘This is a more comfortable place to smoke a pipe in than your room in London, Joe,’ he said, with a complacent glance at the glowing hearth.

Joe never liked to be reminded of

London. He had gone there in a fit of restlessness—in the face of his wife's strong opposition, and the event had proved that he had acted foolishly. He had found little work in his new sphere, and had made a closer acquaintance with poverty than was at all agreeable, and, what was to him infinitely more unpleasant than the necessity of living closely, the harass of uncertainty.

Bob's speech was also irritating, because it suggested that his patronage had secured these comforts; and Joe did not quite relish the fact that his stupid, slow, younger brother had blundered into a snugger berth in life than he had. It was contrary to the rules which should regulate the course of affairs, that Bob's fortune should have been—on a superficial view—made by his going to prison once; while Joe, who had kept

himself out of scrapes, had come down in the world.

It is a very old difficulty, and a very crude one—the caprice of fortune ; but it is as fresh to each of us as if it had not been felt in every generation ; and Joe's perplexity was as great as that of the Psalmist when he wrote : ' He putteth down one, and setteth up another.'

' Ay, Bob, it is that,' said Lizzie. ' I'm sure I can't be thankful enough for the change. It was a good day for us when you brought us Mr. Fairfax. Eh, how well I remember seeing him the first time !'

' We'll not talk of that,' interrupted Bob hastily. ' Say nothing's a canny thing.'

' I shouldn't talk of it except to you or Joe,' said Lizzie, somewhat disgusted at being suppressed.

‘A still tongue makes a wise head,’ returned Bob oracularly.

‘It’s not what I ever thought to come to,’ said Joe querulously, ‘to be beholden to any man, and to take a servant’s place like this.’

‘You might be thankful to have the chance,’ said Bob drily. ‘It’s hard to please you.’

‘Thankful to be a helpless creature taking a kind of charity?’

‘It isn’t charity. Mr. Fairfax would put somebody else here if you hadn’t come. And if it was charity, you needn’t be so over-proud as to mind taking it from him. He doesn’t look on it as anything but a return. He told me so himself, in those very words. “Bob,” says he, “your brother and sister saved my life, and I owe them a vast more nor I can do for them.”’

Bob lowered his voice as he uttered the last words, and spoke in a mysterious way. 'It isn't a thing that I'd talk of, and nobody must know how we came to know him.'

'Why, Bob, I should think not!' cried Lizzie. 'We aren't such fools!'

'You needn't trouble yourself,' added Joe. 'Lizzie and me can hold our tongues as well as you.'

'Ay, ay, I know that,' said Bob. 'Bless you, I'm sure of that! But it gives me a queer feel to talk of it—I can't help looking round to see if anybody's near enough to listen. Not a word of it has crossed my lips, except to you, since the day we went away.'

'Doesn't he ever speak of it?' said Joe.

Bob's shake of the head was emphatic.

'Never—never a word. He thinks about it a deal too much.'

'Ah, poor fellow, it was a terrible thing

for him !' sighed Lizzie. 'It's a pity but he could forget it.'

'I hope he'll stop here awhile. He's been more cheery since he took to going to the Vicarage.'

'Eh,' cried Lizzie, with quick interest, 'if he found a wife there, that would be a fine thing for him !'

'Well, that's as it turns out,' said Bob. 'I think it would be the best thing he could do to settle. It's bad for him to be so much alone ; there's nothing to keep him from thinking.'

'Well, I'd back a wife to do *that* for him,' rejoined Joe significantly.

'He'd have her to talk to and enliven him,' said Bob, missing the point of his brother's sarcasm.

'But I doubt,' again sighed Lizzie, 'that tha told story'll stand in his way.'

‘Don’t be always casting that up,’ said Bob, almost pettishly.

‘I’m none casting it up.’

‘Why should that stand in his way? It’s done him harm enough already, and it was all a lie from beginning to end. Besides, nobody need ever know.’

‘Eh, I don’t know. Things come out so queerly.’

‘There’s no reason why this should ever come out,’ insisted Bob. ‘He’ll find a wife fast enough if he likes. Any young lady would jump at him. He’s good-looking, and a thorough gentleman, and well-off—he needn’t go far.’

END OF VOL. I.

22-

14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED
LOAN DEPT.

This book is due on the last date stamped below, or
on the date to which renewed.

Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

JUL 13 1967 88

REC'D

JUL 20 '67 -8 PM

LOAN DEPT.

AUG 11 1973 50

RETURNED TO

AUG 6 1973

LOAN AHC

SEP 20 1939

M37491

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

